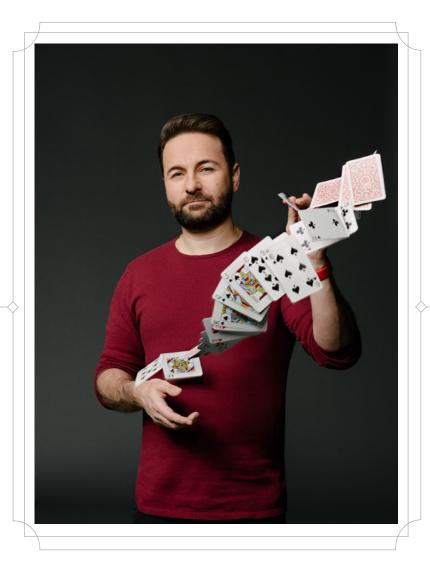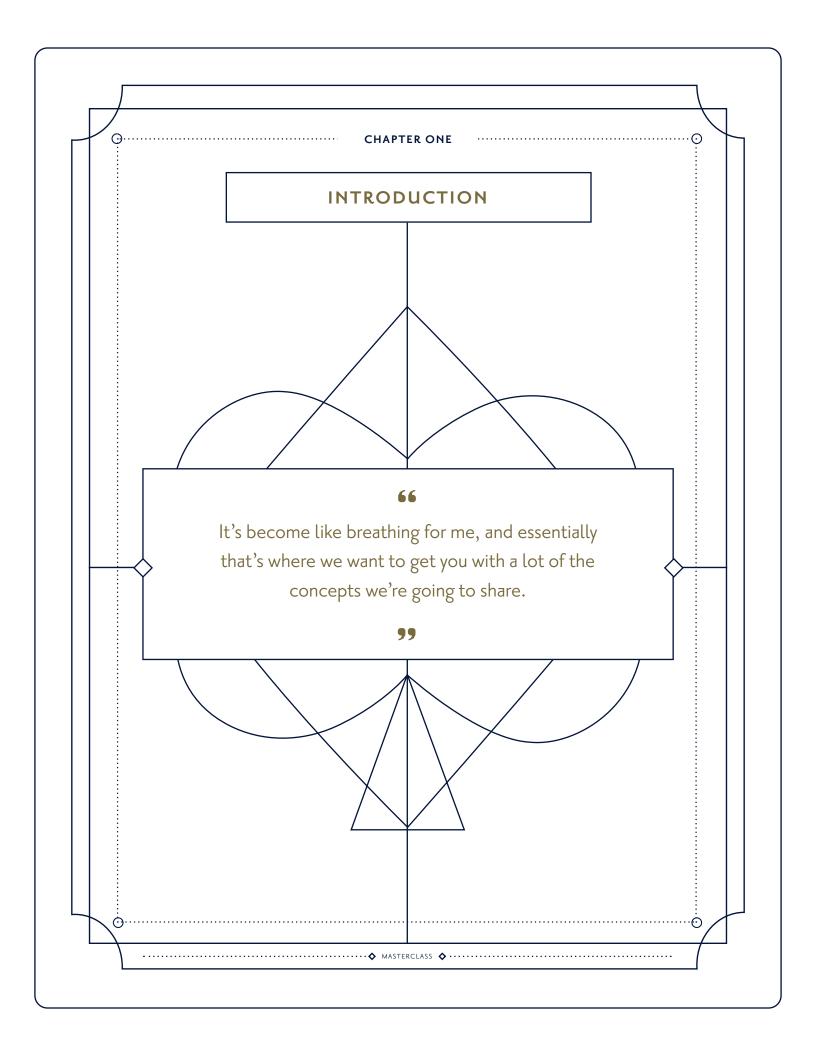# DANIEL NEGREANU

## TEACHES POKER

MASTERCLASS

# BIOGRAPHY



**D**aniel "Kid Poker" Negreanu is one of the most successful, respected, and influential poker players alive today. He has won six World Series of Poker (WSOP) bracelets and two World Poker Tour (WPT) championship titles. In addition, as of this writing, he has amassed nearly $40 million in prize money, making him the biggest live tournament winner of all time. Daniel has also received numerous awards and honors within the poker community. He has been inducted into the Poker Hall of Fame, was named Player of the Decade by the Global Poker Index (GPI), and is the only player in history to receive the coveted WSOP Player of the Year award more than once. In addition to his winnings and honors, Negreanu is known for his genial, boisterous personality as well as his balanced lifestyle and his use of mindfulness, meditation, and visualization. Perhaps the thing that Daniel is most well-known for, however, is his secret weapon—the almost mystical ability to pinpoint his opponents' exact cards through reasoning, deduction, and a superior awareness of human behavior and psychology.

# INTRODUCTION

> "
>
> It's become like breathing for me, and essentially that's where we want to get you with a lot of the concepts we're going to share.
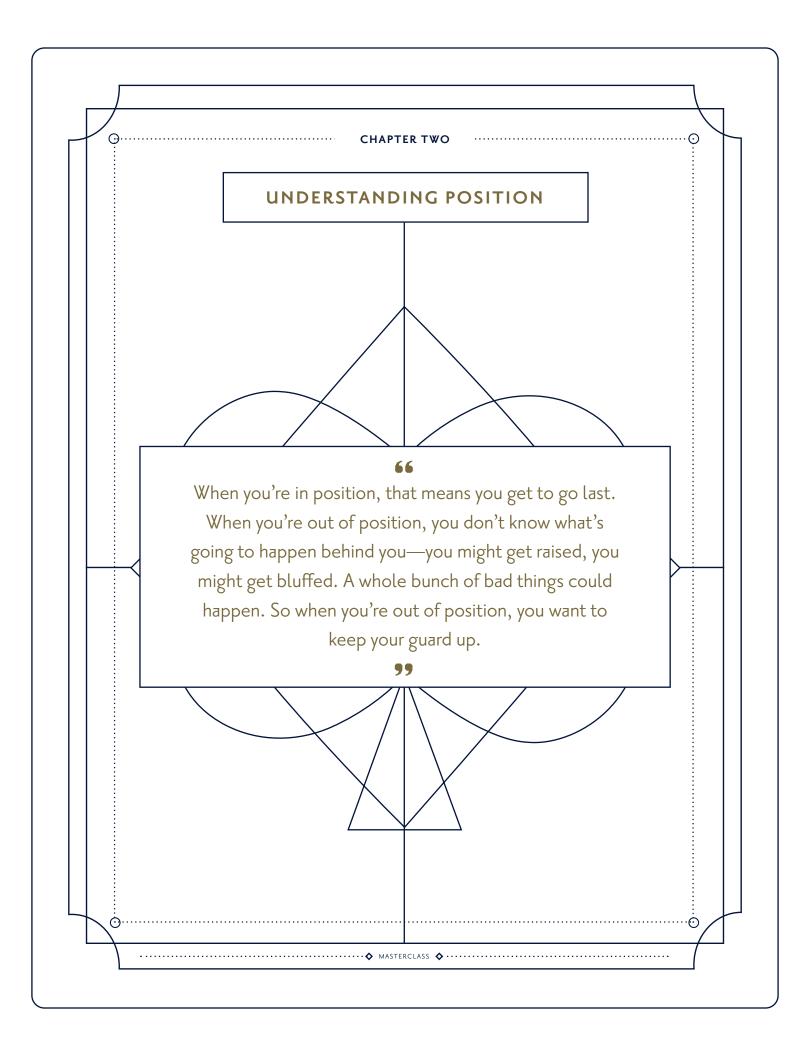>
> "

# INTRODUCTION

♠

## Welcome to Daniel Negreanu's Masterclass.

Daniel believes in a four-stage learning process. In the first stage, you don't understand the concepts. In the second stage, you understand what you are doing wrong, but you don't know how to improve. In the third stage, you learn how to improve at these concepts, but they feel difficult to apply. In the final stage, these concepts become automatic—you can employ them without any conscious effort; they're as automatic as breathing. Daniel's goal is to get you to stage four with the poker concepts he teaches in this class.

### UP YOUR GAME

◇ Get to know your new instructor by seeking out footage of high-caliber tournaments in which Daniel has played. Make a personal assessment of his style of play compared to that of his rivals. What are his main strengths as a player?

◇ Dedicate a notepad to this MasterClass. Make notes on lessons you want to revisit. You will also be expected to complete various written exercises as the course progresses.

◇ Throughout the class, we'll ask you to review past hands with Daniel's lessons in mind. When you play live, make sure you record your hands in your notebook. If you play online, make sure you are using database software, so that you can review your playing history. HM2 is the most popular software among players; H2N is a newer, more up-and-coming option; PokerTracker is a simple option that doesn't require much computing power.

◇ We'll often advise you to watch livestreams of poker games on Twitch.tv to learn from other players. We recommend that you browse games on Twitch and find your favorite player, whose playing style feels suited to your own. You can usually tell how good a player is by the stakes they play, and some players will answer your questions in live chats. Generally, the higher the stakes the better, but the best players aren't always the most articulate at expressing their thought processes. Once you've settled on a channel, you can kick back and try to spot hands which match the concept you're learning.

# UNDERSTANDING POSITION

> " When you're in position, that means you get to go last. When you're out of position, you don't know what's going to happen behind you—you might get raised, you might get bluffed. A whole bunch of bad things could happen. So when you're out of position, you want to keep your guard up. "

# UNDERSTANDING POSITION

◇

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## SUBCHAPTERS

- OUT OF POSITION = DEFENSE; IN POSITION = OFFENSE

- PLAYING HANDS IN EARLY POSITION

- PLAYING HANDS IN MIDDLE POSITION

- PLAYING HANDS IN LATE POSITION

- PLAYING HANDS IN THE BLINDS

- SET A BASELINE AND ADJUST ACCORDING TO PLAYER TENDENCIES

- CAPITALIZE ON POSITION TO WIN POTS

- QUIZ: WINNING POTS BASED ON POSITION

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## TABLE POSITIONS



**LATE/LP** CUTOFF

**LATE/LP** BUTTON IN POSITION

**EARLY/EP** SMALL BLIND OUT OF POSITION

**LATE/LP** HIJACK

**MIDDLE/MP** MIDDLE POSITION +1

**EARLY/EP** BIG BLIND

**MIDDLE/MP** MIDDLE POSITION

**EARLY/EP** UNDER THE GUN +1

**EARLY/EP** UNDER THE GUN

❝Position" refers to the order in which you act—and in poker, being able to act last is an advantage. This is called being "in position." Conversely, if you have to act first, you're at a disadvantage. This is called being "out of position." Position is important because it's a game of incomplete information. If your opponent always has to act before you, you will make your decision with more information than your opponent had. The extra information you get by being in position is incredibly important in terms of your win rate because better decisions can be made with more information, and you also gain much better control of the hand when in position. Because of this inherent positional dynamic, you must have a more defensive mindset when out of position. In contrast, when you are in position you must take full advantage by being more aggressive to maximize your profitable opportunities.

The range of hands you can open raise with is at its tightest in early position (see Appendix 1). In this position you are likely to be out of position for the rest of the hand, which means you will have less information and need to play stronger hands overall. You can open an wider range as you move toward middle position (see Appendix 2), and an even wider range in late position (see Appendix 3) because you are now more likely to be in position postflop. Your range when you are on the button will be the widest range that you open raise. This position is the most profitable at the table.

Playing in the blinds is trickier as you will be out of position for the rest of the hand, unless everybody folds up to the small blind and you face a raise in the big blind (see Appendix 4). Even though these positions get a discount preflop, this still doesn't overcome the positional disadvantage postflop. This means that you will need to play a more cautious game from these positions with tight ranges.

The ranges you open with as a default strategy from each position must be adjusted according to player tendencies. Your default strategy is only a guide based on the average player in your games. As soon as you have information you must make adjustments to target the maximum profit available. For example, if you are in the cutoff and the button is a player who three-bets aggressively, then you must tighten your opening range due to the positional disadvantage postflop. On the other hand, if you are in the small blind and the big blind is folding too much, then you can open a wider range than your default strategy calls for. Making accurate adjustments is the hallmark of high-stakes players and is an important part of your game.
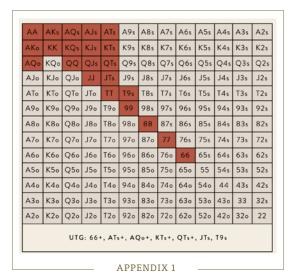
Position will help you to win pots when you don't have a strong hand. When you and your opponent both miss the flop, your positional advantage will see you win those pots most often. Being in position also allows you to apply added pressure to your opponents to win pots when you have a second-best hand. Even if they suspect that you have a weak hand, it's very difficult for them to do anything about it.

—— UP YOUR GAME ——

◇ Record hands where you deviated from your default strategy due to an opponent's tendencies. Deviating too far from your normal ranges can be a big mistake, so you must review these hands in depth. This is an important topic to master because exploiting your opponents is the key to playing higher stakes games, and it also gives you added insight into how your opponents might be exploiting you.
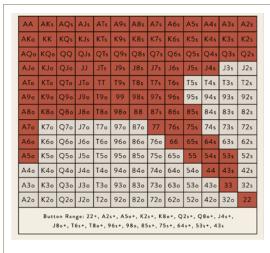
◇ Online players should periodically analyze their win rates from the blinds and check which hands in their range are profitable. These positions are the most difficult to play at the table and require the most attention during your study time. The positional disadvantage postflop requires a tight overall strategy, which beginners tend to underestimate due to the preflop discount.

## CHAPTER TWO APPENDIXES

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

UTG: 66+, ATs+, AQo+, KTs+, QTs+, JTs, T9s

**APPENDIX 1**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

Middle Position: 33+, A2s+, ATo+, K9s+, KJo+,
Q9s+, QJo,J9s+, T9s, 98s, 87s

**APPENDIX 2**

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

Button Range: 22+, A2s+, A5o+, K2s+, K8o+, Q2s+, Q8o+, J4s+,
J8o+, T6s+, T8o+, 96s+, 98o, 85s+, 75s+, 64s+, 53s+, 43s

**APPENDIX 3**

*Potential range purely for the purposes of demonstration.
Actual ranges are dependent on the player and situation.*

## CHAPTER TWO APPENDIXES

### SMALL BLIND VS. UNDER THE GUN

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

Green: 3-Bet
Gold: Calling Range

### BIG BLIND VS. UNDER THE GUN

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

Green: 3-Bet
Gold: Calling Range

APPENDIX 4

*Potential range purely for the purposes of demonstration.*
*Actual ranges are  dependent on the player and situation.*

# HAND RANGES
# AND BOARD TEXTURE

> "
> The more accurately you can pinpoint an opponent's range, the more sophisticated decisions you can make and the more accurate they will be.
> "

# HAND RANGES AND BOARD TEXTURE

## SUBCHAPTERS

- STRIVE TO IDENTIFY RANGES, NOT SPECIFIC HANDS
- BUILD A MENTAL DATABASE OF YOUR OPPONENTS' RANGES
- AS BETTING GROWS, RANGES BECOME MORE POLARIZED
- KEEP YOUR RANGE BALANCED
- PLAYING AGAINST AN OPPONENT'S PERCEIVED RANGE

- RANGE ADVANTAGE ON DRY FLOPS
- BE MORE AGGRESSIVE WHEN YOU HAVE RANGE ADVANTAGE
- RANGE ADVANTAGE ON WET FLOPS
- FACTOR PLAYER TENDENCIES INTO RANGE ADVANTAGE
- THINK AHEAD

- MAKE ADJUSTMENTS TO YOUR RANGES BASED ON PERCEPTION
- HOW TO ADJUST YOUR RANGES BASED ON PERCEPTION
- ADJUST YOUR RANGES BASED ON OPPONENTS, NOT STAKES
- IDENTIFYING UNUSUAL BETTING PATTERNS TO NARROW RANGES: AMATEUR VS. TONY G

## TERMS

**BALANCED RANGE (N.):** An unexploitable range that includes both strong hands and weak hands with potential. Even if your opponents know what your range is, they won't be able to exploit it if it's perfectly balanced.

**BARREL (N.):** A bet on a postflop street.

**BOARD TEXTURE (N.):** The characteristics of the flop—whether wet, with many draws and nutted hands possible, or dry, without draws and no hand better than a set possible.

**CHECKING RANGE (N.):** The range of hands with which a player checks.

**COLD CALL (V.):** To call a single preflop raise.

**COLD-CALLING RANGE (N.):** The range of hands with which you call a single preflop raise.

**COMBINATION (N.):** A specific set of hole cards. Note that suit is important here.

**CONTINUING RANGE (N.):** The range of hands with which you call or raise a bet from another player.

**FIRE THREE BARRELS (V.):** To make a bet on the flop, turn, and river.

**HAND RANGE (N.):** All the hands a player could have in a specific situation. This changes as the hand progresses.

**HEADS-UP POT (N.):** A pot with two players.

**HIGH-EQUITY DRAW (N.):** A draw which has many outs.

**LIMP IN (V.):** To enter the pot before the flop by simply matching the big blind's bet, rather than raising.

**LOOSE PLAYER (N.):** A player who plays a wide range preflop.

**LOOSE RANGE (N.):** A range of hands containing many combinations. Used interchangeably with "wide range."

**MULTI-WAY POT (N.):** A pot with three or more players.

**NUTTED HAND (N.):** A hand that almost always rates to be the best. You can also describe a player holding such a hand as "nutted."

**OUTS (N.):** Cards you need to complete your draw.

**OPEN LIMP (N.):** When the first player enters the pot by choice. This doesn't include the blinds, as those are forced bets. Used interchangeably with "open raise."

**POLARIZED (ADJ.):** When a range consists of only strong hands and very weak hands. The more polarized a range, the stronger the value hands and the weaker the bluffs.

**RANGE ADVANTAGE (N.):** An advantage in which your range of hands compares favorably to another range.

**RANGE VS. RANGE EQUITY (N.):** A comparison between the equity of multiple ranges.

**STREET (N.):** A segment of play. Any card that is dealt or any betting round.

**TIGHT RANGE (N.):** A range of hands containing few combinations.

**TURN YOUR HAND FACE UP (V.):** When you let other players know almost for certain what you have. You don't literally flip your cards over, but you may as well have done so.

**VALUE HAND (N.):** A hand that you can bet with and expect to be called by worse hands frequently enough to show a profit.

**WET BOARD (N.):** A coordinated board with multiple draws possible.

**WET FLOP (N.):** A flop with many possible draws available.

**P**OKER HAS EVOLVED to the point where skilled players no longer think in terms of single hands—they think in terms of the range of hands they could have or could make their opponent think they have versus the range of hands they think their opponent has. So when Daniel discusses a player's range, he's talking about every hand that they could logically have in that specific situation. Ideally, you should strive to narrow down your opponent's range as much as possible by tracking and evaluating their patterns of play. When playing against some opponents who always play hands the same way without ever changing their strategy, you can sometimes pinpoint their exact hand.

Start by separating your opponent's range into value hands and bluffs, because you mostly don't need to know exactly what their bluff hand is, only that they are bluffing with a certain frequency. There is no set limit on how long it takes to understand a player's range, but Daniel estimates that observing around a hundred hands is sufficient to build up a workable picture. Start this process by first assessing how many hands they are opening from each position and progress to assessing how frequently they cold call and three-bet preflop.

As the bet sizes get bigger on later streets, ranges become more polarized. This means that the value hands become stronger and the bluffs weaker. As the bets get bigger, the range of hands that your opponent will continue to bet with gets tighter, meaning you need a stronger hand to value raise.

A balanced range is a range of hands that is unexploitable by virtue of a varied playing strategy. For example, if you always bet your pairs and check all other hands, then you will be easily read and exploited by your opponents. To illustrate this, Daniel gives the example of "Harry," who only raises under the gun when he has a premium pair or $A$ $K$ .

If Harry checks after the flop, you know he doesn't have a pair—which means he definitely has $A$ $K$ .

To avoid being read like this and exploited, you have to balance the range of hands you bet in every situation. You should check strong hands some of the time, and bet some bluffs as well. This strategy will keep your opponents guessing in every situation and protect your checking range postflop from becoming too weak.

The concept of range versus range equity is the method by which you analyze which player has the best range on a board. For example, a player open raising a tight range from under the gun in a nine-handed cash game will have a higher proportion of strong hands than a usual button cold-calling range on a $2$ $2$ $3$ flop.

You can see from this example (Appendix 1) that the button's calling range is missing pocket aces and kings, and they have many weak hands which do not connect with this flop. The end result is that the button has less equity than under the gun. On the other hand, under the gun has a much tighter range of hands which includes many overpairs as well as a stronger selection of overcards. Being aware of this allows you to make better decisions postflop. This doesn't mean you stop adjusting to your opponents, but it does give you added information to factor into your plan for the hand.

Wet flops are a great example of how range advantage can give you an opportunity to exploit your opponents (see Appendix 2). Cold-calling ranges tend to hit these flops hard, putting a player with a premium pair in a difficult situation when facing a postflop raise. You are able to raise this board type if you called preflop because your range contains all the nutted hands as well as high-equity draws. Often you will be able to win hands postflop without even making a pair due to your range advantage because good opponents will know that your range connects with the board much better than theirs does. This means your bets apply added pressure. If you are the

open raiser with a range disadvantage, you must play more cautiously to avoid expensive mistakes.

Always consider your opponent's tendencies when assessing who has range advantage. Against an average player who is cold calling preflop—which means they're calling a single preflop raise—you might expect to have a disadvantage on a board most of the time, but if your opponent is a loose player this will not be the case. This is because a loose player will have many weak hands in their range which will, on average, make less strong hands. You must also think ahead when considering how to use this information. For example, you might think that you have a range advantage, but assess that your opponent will not fold on the flop or the turn, meaning you need to bet all three streets as a bluff to win the pot.

Constantly adjust your ranges to how they are being perceived. For example, if you have shown down a number of speculative hands from early position, then your opponents will think you are a loose player. To exploit their perception, you must tighten your opening ranges so they are attacking your premium hands more often. This also means you must always be on your guard against any adjustments your opponents are making. Look at the weakest hands in your range when considering your adjustments and expand or remove hands based on the specific situation. It is important, however, that you make your adjustments based solely on your opponents and never factor the stakes into your decision. The numbers work exactly the same regardless of the stakes, because it's the same game.

Daniel reviews a hand played between high-stakes pro Tony G and unknown qualifier Elizabeth Houston to illustrate just how accurately you can sometimes narrow down your opponent's range. In this hand, Elizabeth limps with A♠ A♣ and both Daniel and Viffer limp behind. Tony G then takes the initiative and raises with 5♣ 5♠. Elizabeth is next to act and reraises. Daniel and Viffer both fold. The flop comes 10♦, 7♦, 9♣ and Tony checks. Elizabeth makes a continuation bet. Tony folds.

Tony's raise comes as no surprise because he's a very aggressive player and will have a wide range here. Once the action is back on Elizabeth everybody is already trying to put her on a range of hands. If she calls the raise, then the range is expected to be tight. Once she makes a reraise though, it's clear to all the professionals that her hand is likely to be pocket aces only. It won't always be this easy to pinpoint an exact hand for your opponent, but this is a good example of how clear it can be.

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## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Download the Equilab app to use as a visual aid to better understand hand ranges.
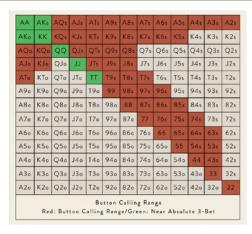
◇ Learn to build a mental picture of your opponent's preflop ranges by memorizing your own preflop ranges using the Equilab app, then assess how their ranges compare to yours. This exercise will improve your mental clarity when adjusting your opponent's range during play and allow you to make more accurate decisions.

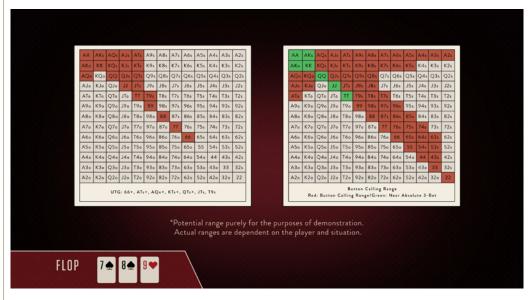◇ While there is no clear line in the sand between wet and dry boards, wet boards are ones with many draws possible. 9♥ 8♥ 7♥ is very wet because three straights and a flush are pos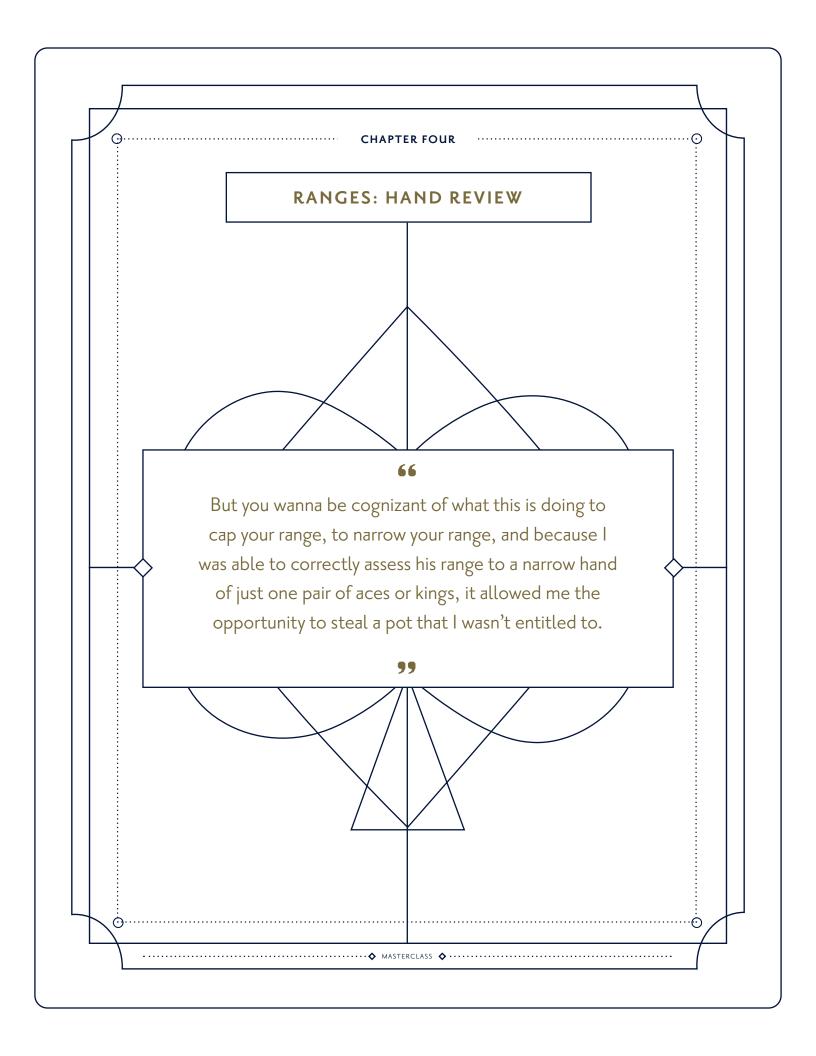sible, as well as many draws to those hands. A♥ 7♦ 2♣ is not because there is no draw available to either a flush or straight.

─── **CHAPTER THREE APPENDIX** ───



APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2

# RANGES: HAND REVIEW

> "
>
> But you wanna be cognizant of what this is doing to cap your range, to narrow your range, and because I was able to correctly assess his range to a narrow hand of just one pair of aces or kings, it allowed me the opportunity to steal a pot that I wasn't entitled to.
>
> "

# RANGES: HAND REVIEW

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### SUBCHAPTERS

• USING BET SIZING TO NARROW AN
OPPONENT'S RANGE VS. ANGEL SHLOMI

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### TERMS

**CONTINUATION BET (N.):**
A bet made by the player who made
the last bet or raise. This term is
often abbreviated "c-bet."

**FIRE A BARREL (V.):** To bet.

**OVERPAIR (N.):** A pair that
ranks higher than any possible pair on
the board.

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### CHAPTER REVIEW

#### THE HAND:

Angel Shlomi opens K♠ K♣ under the gun for an
unusually large sizing. Freddy Bonyadi calls with
6♦ 6♥ and Daniel calls with 10♦ 9♦ on the button.

The flop comes 9♠ 5♠ 4♣ and Shlomi makes a
pot-sized c-bet. Bonyadi folds and Daniel calls.

The turn is Q♥ and Shlomi makes another c-bet for
slightly less than half the pot. Daniel calls again.

The river is 8♣ and Shlomi fires a small third barrel.
Daniel makes a large raise and Shlomi folds.

#### DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:

Shlomi's large raise size indicates that he has a premium
hand. Daniel uses this information by calling in position
with a speculative hand and understanding that he may
be able to bluff Shlomi off of what is likely a one-pair hand
on later streets.

On the flop, although Daniel has top pair he is only beat-
ing ace–king out of Shlomi's perceived range. The flop
texture is the key to calling the c-bet, because Daniel can

now represent a lot of nutted hands on certain turn and
river cards and bluff his opponent. This is because
the board has a wet texture where many different draws
can complete on the turn or river. Daniel can credibly
represent any of these hands because his preflop calling
range contains all of the combinations needed. It's also
possible to make two pair or trips and know that with
Shlomi likely holding an overpair more value than usual
is on offer.

On the turn, Daniel decides to call with what is likely the
worst hand using exactly the same thought process as he
did on the flop.

Shlomi's small bet size on the river indicates that his
range is likely only pocket aces or kings. 8♣ also
completes Daniel's straight draw so he puts his original
plan into action and turns his second pair into a bluff. The
large raise size is necessary because of how likely it is that
his opponent holds an overpair. Many players will call a
small raise in this situation if they hold an overpair.

Shlomi now understands that he can only beat a bluff.
There are two straights possible and the only likely bluff
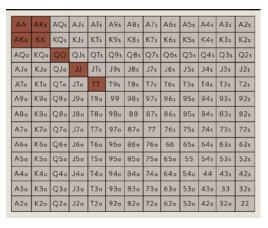
is a missed flush draw, but because he holds the Ks in his hand that drastically reduces the number of missed flush draw combinations.
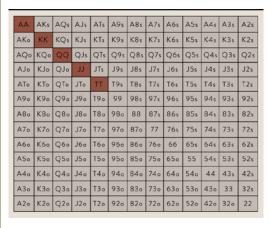
Daniel uses table talk psychology to suggest to Shlomi that he might have pocket aces or kings. This ploy is designed to make him think that if Daniel knows what he has, and he still raises, then his pocket kings must be beat.

Shlmoi made a serious error with his preflop bet sizing, so that his opponents were able to narrow down his range (Appendix 1). This mistake coupled with the pot-sized c-bet on the flop made life for his opponents too easy when they knew almost for certain what he had (Appendix 2).

On the turn, Shlmoi's small bet size indicates that he doesn't have pocket queens, and pocket tens and jacks are now unlikely because it makes more sense to check the turn. This makes an expected range of only K K or A A extremely likely (Appendix 3).

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### CHAPTER FOUR APPENDIXES

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

APPENDIX 1

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

APPENDIX 2

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

APPENDIX 3

# GAME THEORY AND MATH

> **"**
>
> Every time you deviate from a game theory optimal strategy, you become exploitable as well.
>
> **"**

# GAME THEORY AND MATH

◇

## TERMS

**GAME THEORY OPTIMAL (GTO) POKER (N.):** A defensive playing strategy that aims to make you unexploitable to your opponents.

**IMPLIED ODDS (N.):** Pot odds that factor in how much money you can win on later streets.

**OUTS (N.):** Cards you need to complete your draw.

**POT ODDS (N.):** The ratio between the size of the pot and the size of the bet you are facing.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

GAME THEORY OPTIMAL (GTO) POKER is an umbrella term players use to describe the holy grail of playing strategy, by which you are unexploitable to your opponents. GTO is essentially a defensive strategy that incorporates the principles of balanced ranges (see Chapter 3: Hand Ranges and Board Texture) and mixed strategy (see Chapter 15: Mixed Strategy). At its most basic level, GTO poker aims to avoid the exploitation that can happen if you make a specific play either too frequently or not frequently enough. The problem with GTO poker is that it's not an exploitative strategy aiming for maximum profit. Daniel advises that GTO poker should be your baseline strategy, but you should deviate from it in order to exploit your opponents. The key is to exploit your opponents with discreet adjustments, so that they don't realize your strategy.

You must create a hybrid strategy between GTO and exploitative play to maximize your profit, but always remember that GTO play is not necessary against weak opponents. Weak opponents always make mistakes, which means that you must always target them with adjustments rather than worry about being defensive.

Pot odds is the ratio between the size of the pot and the size of the bet you are facing. For example, if there is $100 in the pot and the bet is $100, then the pot is now $200 and you have to call $100. So, the ratio is 200 (pot) : 100 (to call), and you have 2:1 odds (33percent). This is the risk-to-reward ratio that controls how wide your continuing range can be. If you are getting high pot odds then you can continue with a wide range, but low pot odds mean you must play tight. Multiplying the number of outs you have by four on the flop, or two on the turn, is a close approximation of the percentage that your draw will hit. For example, if you hold two hearts, and there are two on the flop, you have nine outs to hit your draw, giving an approximation of 18percent to hit on the turn, or 36percent to hit by the river. This shortcut can be used in conjunction with pot odds to assess if your draw is worth continuing with.

Implied odds are pot odds that factor in how much money you can win on later streets. You might not be getting good enough pot odds on the flop to call with a particular draw, but by assessing how much you can potentially win on the turn and river you might still be able to profitably call. For example, if an opponent makes a bet the size of 10 big blinds into a pot of 20 big blinds, the pot has 30 big blinds with 10 still to call. If you have a flush draw (nine outs), you are getting 3:1 pot odds, which are worse than the 4.22-1 needed to profitably make the call. (For a more detailed breakdown of pot odds, see the Up Your Game section.) But because of the potential profit you can make on the turn and river if your draw hits, you can make this call, even though it is not profitable in isolation.

You can also use the size of the pot and the bet to assess how often you should be continuing and folding.

**Bet / (Pot + Bet) = Folding Frequency**

This formula gives the percentage that you should fold. You should still assess each situation on its own merits and make adjustments based on the strength of your hand and your opponent instead of only relying on this formula.

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## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Use the folding frequency formula to calculate how often you should be folding and continuing for bet sizes of 33, 50, 66, 75, and 100 percent of the pot. You will face these bet sizes most often and must memorize what percentage of your range you need to fold.

◇ Read the overview of poker math and the breakdown of pot odds on the following pages. Memorize the table of outs to allow instant recognition of how often your draws will hit. This basic knowledge is fundamental to accurate decision making.

◇ To learn more about advanced poker mathematics, read "How to Take Your Poker Math Beyond Counting Outs" Part 1 and Part 2 from Pokernews.com.

## OVERVIEW: POKER MATH

Poker is a game that demands several skills be used at once, and the best players also use some basic mathematics to help them make the correct decisions. It is not necessary to have a really complex mathematical mind to play poker—so don't be discouraged—but there are a few elements to the game that all players should learn.

We have already seen how the relative strength of a poker hand can increase or decrease as flop, turn, and river are dealt. For example A♠ A♣ is a big favorite against A♥ K♥ preflop, but becomes a huge underdog if the flop comes Q♥ 8♥ 2♥.

If you have a hand that is probably behind, but has the potential to improve to a winner, you need to decide whether it is worth continuing with it through the various streets, and how much you are prepared to pay to do so.

This article explains the calculations required to make the right decision about "drawing hands," i.e., hands that will need to connect with later community cards to win.

The first step is to identify the cards that will improve your hand (known as "outs"). Once you have managed that, you can move on to calculating how they might help you.

### CALCULATING OUTS

"Outs" are the cards left in the deck that improve your hand and will help you win the pot at showdown. The best way to demonstrate what we mean by outs is to look at a few common examples:

**Example with a flush draw:**
You are holding A♥ 3♥ and the flop is 7♥ 9♣ K♥. If another heart appears on the turn or river, you make a flush, and unless another player has a full house or better, you will win the hand. (The board isn't paired, so none of our opponents can have a full house yet.) There are 13

cards of each suit in the deck. You hold two of them, and another two are on the board. Four of the 13 hearts have therefore already been dealt, meaning that there are still nine hearts left in the deck.

This means you have nine cards that can improve your hand to a probable winner. You have nine outs.

**Example with a straight draw:**
You have J♠ 10♠ and the flop is 6♣ Q♥ K♥. Now any ace or nine will complete your straight. There are four aces and four nines in the deck, so you have eight outs.

If one card is missing to complete a straight, you have four outs. For example, if your hole cards were A♥ J♠ and the flop was K♣ Q♥ 7♦, your outs would be 10♠ 10♣ 10♥ 10♦.

**Example with a straight draw and overcards:**
You have K♥ J♥ and the board is A♠ 10♥ 2♣. One of the four queens in the deck will make you a straight. If your opponent has a middle pocket pair, e.g., 9♣ 9♥, then you have additional outs, as any king or any jack would give you a higher pair.

In this case, the number of your outs would increase to 10 (four queens, three kings, and three jacks).

**Example with a set against a flush draw:**
If you hold 7♦ 7♥ and hit a set on a board showing 2♠ 7♠ J♠, you have a pretty strong hand. But it is not definitely a winner and could already be behind if any of your opponents has two spades in his hand.

However, you still have the chance here of improving your hand even further. There are seven cards that could make you a full house or better (a seven, three remaining twos and three remaining jacks), or the turn and river could be the same rank, which would also give you a full house.

**Example with a straight *and* a flush draw:**
You hold 6♥ 7♥ and the board is 4♥ 5♣ J♥.

You have both an open-ended straight draw and a flush draw. This means you have nine outs to make the flush and eight outs to make the straight. At the same time, you have to consider that two cards are counted twice (in this case the 3♥ and the 8♥), which have to be subtracted. Therefore you have a total of 15 outs here.

## HIDDEN OUTS

Although the term "out" typically refers to a card that improves your hand, there are also sometimes "hidden outs," which help you because they reduce the value of your opponent's hand.

### Example of hidden outs:

You hold A♣ K♣ and your opponent has 3♥ 3♠. The board is J♦ J♠ 5♣ 6♦. Not only would the three kings and the three aces give you a higher two pair than your opponent, but any six or five would help as well.

This is because with a five or six, the board contains two pairs that are both higher than your opponent's pocket threes, meaning that the fifth card, the kicker, would decide the outcome of the hand. Your ace is the best possible kicker.

In this instance, you have 12 outs, six of which are hidden.

## DISCOUNTED OUTS

Advanced players don't only calculate their own outs when on a draw. They also ask themselves what hand their opponent has, and whether one of the cards they hope to appear might also give the other player an even better hand.

Cards like this are known as "discounted outs."

### The straight draw example again:

You have J♥ 10♠ and the flop is 6♣ Q♥ K♥. You have calculated eight outs so far (four aces and four nines).

But how will your outs change if one of your opponents has two hearts, e.g., 7♥ 6♥, and is therefore drawing to a flush?

In this example, two of your outs, i.e., A♥ and 9♥, would give your opponent a better hand—even if you hit your straight.

This means you have to discount both cards from your outs. You would now only have six outs, which significantly reduces your chances of winning the hand.

In general you should take a pessimistic approach when it comes to discounting outs, as it is better to discount one out too many than one too few!

## POT ODDS AND EXPECTED VALUE

In cash games, you simply have to determine whether a call is "correct" in a mathematical sense. This means determining whether you would make money or lose money if you made the same decision in the same situation an infinite number of times. You compare what you would expect to win with what it will cost you to stay involved in a pot.

When your expected value is positive, you should stay in the hand.

This may sound complicated, but it need not necessarily be so. Calculating your expected value is a two-stage process, involving calculating your "pot odds", explained below, and then comparing that figure with the odds you have of hitting one of your outs.

## POT ODDS

Pot odds are defined as the ratio between the size of the pot and the bet facing you. For example, if there is $4 in the pot and your opponent bets $1, you are being asked to pay one-fifth of the pot in order to have a chance of winning it.

A call of $1 to win $5 represents pot odds of 5:1.

If you are asked to pay $1 to win $10, you have odds of 10:1. If you need to find $3 to win $9, you have 3:1 and so on.

(Note: The size of the pot refers to the chips that are already in the pot, as well as all the bets made in the current betting round.)

Once you have determined the pot odds, you need to determine the odds of hitting your draw.

### ODDS OF HITTING YOUR DRAW

The chart below shows a list of the most common draws you face in Texas Hold'em and the approximate chance you have of hitting them.

The first column (Outs) shows the number of outs you have; the second column (Odds Flop to Turn) shows the chance of hitting the draw on the next card; the next column (Odds Flop to River) shows the odds of hitting on the turn or river, i.e., on either of next two cards.

| OUTS | ODDS FLOP TO TURN | ODDS FLOP TO RIVER | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 45:1 | 22:1 | Smaller set vs. Higher set |
| 2 | 22:1 | 11:1 | Higher pocket pair vs. Smaller set |
| 3 | 15:1 | 7:1 | One overcard |
| 4 | 11:1 | 5:1 | Gutshot straight draw |
| 5 | 8:1 | 4:1 | Middle pair vs. Higher pair |
| 6 | 7:1 | 3:1 | Two overcards |
| 7 | 6:1 | 2,5:1 | Gutshot straight draw plus overcard |
| 8 | 5:1 | 2:1 | Open-ended straight draw |
| 9 | 4:1 | 2:1 | Flush draw |
| 10 | 4:1 | 1,6:1 | Gutshot plus two overcards |
| 11 | 3:1 | 1,4:1 | — |
| 12 | 3:1 | 1,2:1 | Gutshot and flush draw |
| 13 | 2,5:1 | 1,1:1 | — |
| 14 | 2,4:1 | 1:1 | Straight draw plus two overcards |
| 15 | 2:1 | 1:1 | Flush draw plus two over-cards |

### Comparing ratios to determine expected value:

After you have found the two ratios, you must compare them against each other—the odds of you winning the hand (based on your outs) compared with the pot odds offered on your call.

If the pot odds are higher than your odds of winning, you should call (or raise, in exceptional circumstances). If your pot odds are lower than your chances of winning, you should fold.

Here are a couple of solid examples:

### Example with the nut flush draw:

You have the nut flush draw (nine outs) on the flop and the pot is $4. Your opponent bets $1. There is now $5 in the pot ($4 + $1), and it is $1 to call. The pot odds are therefore 5:1. According to the chart, your odds are 4:1 to hit your flush draw. The pot odds are higher. You should therefore call.

You can see why this call is correct by looking at the long-term picture. If you make this call four times, mathematics says that you will hit your draw once. That means you will win $5 for every $4 (4 * $1) you invest. That is good business.

### Example of pot odds with a straight draw:

You have a gutshot straight draw (four outs) on the flop and there is $25 in the pot. Your opponent bets $5. There is now $30 in the pot ($25 + $5), and it is $5 to call. Your pot odds are therefore 6:1.

However, according to the table the odds of winning the hand are 11:1. You don't have the right pot odds to call here and should therefore fold.

Again, a glance at the long-term picture reveals why this is so. In this instance, you would need to play ten times in order to win $30. But those ten calls would cost you $50 ($5 * 10) and so this is not profitable.

**How to play against an all in:**

If an opponent moves all in on the flop, you can make the same calculations as described above, but this time look at the Odds Flop to River column. If your opponent is all in, you have the advantage that no further bets are possible.

If you call, you therefore get to see not only the turn, but also the river without having to risk more chips.

**Example of odds with a straight draw against an all in:**

You have an open-ended straight draw (eights outs) on the flop. There is $50 in the pot and your opponent moves all in for $25. You therefore have pot odds of 75 to 25 ($50 plus the $25), and it's $25 to call.

When simplified, the pot odds are 3:1, and if you call you get to see both the turn and the river. According to the column Odds Flop to River in the odds table, the odds of winning the hand are 2:1, and because the pot odds are higher, you should make the call.

**CONCLUSION**

Calculating odds and outs can seem difficult and time-consuming, especially if you are a beginner. But this process is critical to make the right decisions. If you continually play draws without getting the right odds, you will lose money in the long run.

There will always be players who don't care about odds and call too often. These players will occasionally get lucky and win a pot, but mostly they will lose and pay for it.

On the other hand, you might be folding draws in situations where the odds are favorable. If you use the strategies in this article consistently, you can avoid mistakes and gain an edge over your opponents.

**Avoiding results-oriented thinking:**

Even if you have made a correct calculation of your expected value, the fact remains that you will often make a correct call yet still lose the pot. We have factored into the calculation that, for example, you will not hit a flush draw on three out of four occasions.

But you must remember that the key determining factor in these calculations is whether or not you are getting good value on your call in the long term. Cash games are essentially endless and you can rebuy if you lose your chips. We are therefore looking at the decision in the abstract and determining whether this would be a profitable play if you made it time and time again.

It is a mistake in cash game poker to base your decisions only on the results of one particular hand—or even one particular session. Sometimes you might make a good call and lose; sometimes you will make a bad call and win. But don't allow the specific result to alter your decision making. You should base it in mathematics.

# C-BETTING

"

You want to factor in, How many opponents do I have? What does that board texture look like? Position is another factor that you always consider. All those things, as well as table image, your read on your opponents. This is not an exact science, in the sense of c-betting, because there's always different flops, always different situations.

"

# C-BETTING

## SUBCHAPTERS

- FACTOR IN BOARD TEXTURE AND NUMBER OF OPPONENTS
- GOOD BOARDS FOR C-BETTING
- FACTOR IN RANGE ADVANTAGE
- INCREASE C-BETTING FREQUENCY WITH MONSTER DRAWS
- DON'T C-BET ON AUTOPILOT
- HAVE A PLAN FOR THE TURN AND THE RIVER
- CONSIDER POSSIBLE RUNOUTS
- IT'S DIFFICULT TO HIT A FLOP

## TERMS

**CONNECT WITH THE BOARD (V.):** How well your hand hit a particular board. This is measurable in terms of equity.

**CONTINUATION BET (N.):** A bet made by the player who made the last bet or raise. This term is often abbreviated "c-bet."

## CHAPTER REVIEW

A CONTINUATION BET (often abbreviated as "c-bet") is a bet made by the player who made the last bet or raise. As the aggressor, the other players will usually look to that player to continue driving the action. Given that most hands miss the flop, you shouldn't c-bet a hundred percent of the time, or else your range will become too weak and you will also become predictable. The benefits of c-betting are that you will win pots when neither you or your opponent have a hand, and when you do have a hand you will get value.

You must assess many different factors when deciding if you should c-bet. Consider the number of players in the hand, the board texture, and your hand strength. If there are many players in a hand, it's more likely that at least one of them has a strong hand. If the board is wet, it's also more likely that a player has a draw that they won't fold. If the board is dry, on the other hand, it's less likely that a player has connected.

Range advantage is another factor to be taken into account in conjunction with the board type. You must be able to accurately assess the ranges of all players in the hand and have an understanding of how well they connect with various board textures to know who has the advantage. The more negative factors you can see in your own range in comparison to your opponents' ranges, the more you should refrain from c-betting, as the likelihood of your bet succeeding falls dramatically.

You should c-bet more frequently when you have a draw, particularly when it's a monster draw. The stronger the draw, the higher the c-betting frequency. Factor into your decision whether or not your draw is strong enough to stand a raise from your opponent. Monster draws can always call reasonably sized postflop raises; but medium-strength draws cannot, and should be checked more often. Weak draws, such as gut shots, are suitable to use as bluffs because you aren't forced to fold a good hand to a raise. Being forced to fold a medium-strength draw means you lose out on the significant equity your hand had. By betting your draws you have two ways to win the pot. Your opponent either folds, or you make a nutted hand that is unlikely to be beaten.

Don't c-bet on autopilot—which means that you do not have a plan for the turn and river—because it can lead to costly mistakes. Look out for tells from your opponents that you can use to adjust your c-betting strategy. If you pick up a read that an opponent might have a strong hand, then you should use that information when deciding if you should c-bet. Conversely, if your opponent appears disinterested, you should c-bet more frequently.
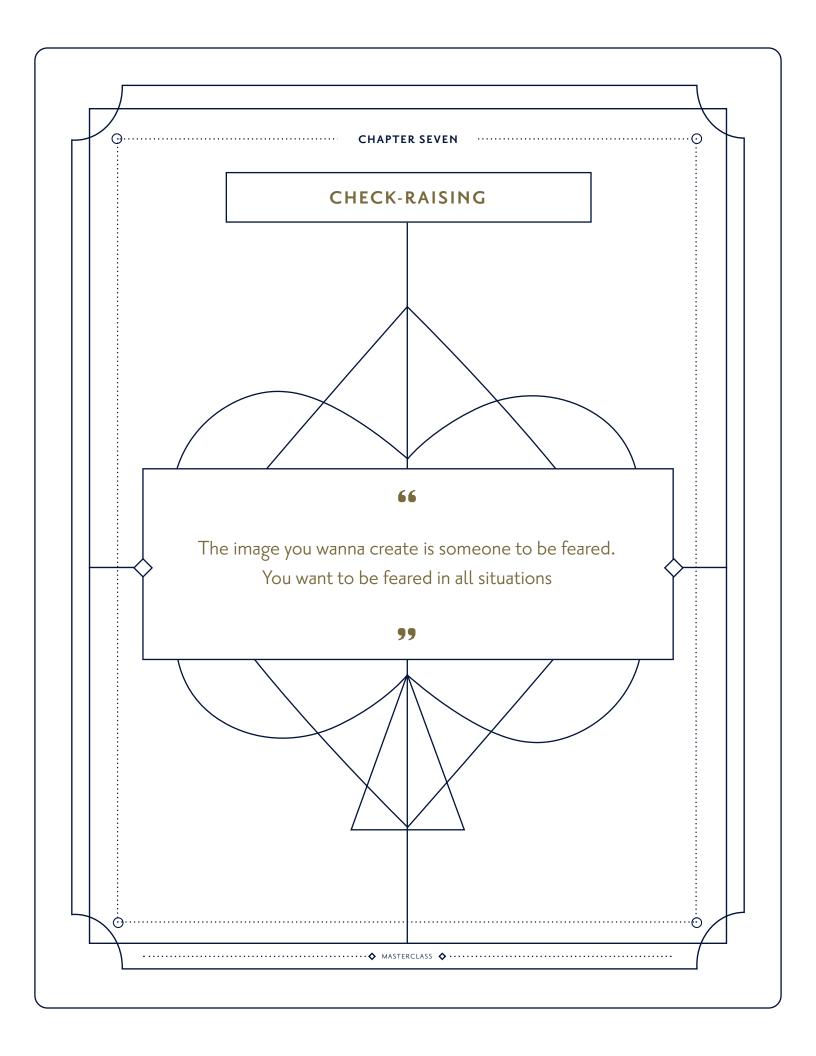
You must assess on different board textures how many streets you need to bet to win the pot. For example, if you open raise in early position and face a single caller in the small blind, you are facing a relatively strong range. In this situation your opponent will often have a hand that is strong enough to call one or two bets. This type of assessment is critical to your c-betting strategy. Your c-betting strategy should incorporate the different board runouts possible. If both the flop and turn have been bet, then the pot size will be large by the river—which will amplify any mistakes. If you arrive at such a scenario without a plan for the runout, then you are at risk of an expensive error.

It is important to remember that unpaired hole cards will miss most flops. This concept means that when a player has a wide range with many non-pocket pair hands, they are unlikely to have connected with the flop and your c-bet success rate will be higher.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Use the Equilab app to examine various flop textures where you have a strong draw against top pair, top kicker (your kicker being the remaining hole card that does not hit the board). Build up a mental picture of which draws have the most equity against a one-pair hand so you can play your monster draws more aggressively.

◇ Use the Equilab app to examine your own opening ranges versus your own cold calling ranges on various board textures to see which has range advantage. This will improve your understanding of range advantage when you encounter players with ranges similar to your own. Improve this skill by assessing the ranges you observe weak players using in your games.

# CHECK-RAISING

> "
>
> The image you wanna create is someone to be feared.
> You want to be feared in all situations
>
> "

# CHECK-RAISING

◇

## SUBCHAPTERS

- KEEP PEOPLE GUESSING WITH YOUR CHECK-RAISING

- BALANCE YOUR CHECK-RAISES WITH CHECK-CALLS

- QUIZ: CHECK-RAISING

- QUIZ: CHECK-RAISING #2

## TERMS

**CHECK-RAISE (v.):** To check postflop and then raise a bet from another player.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

CHECK-RAISING—which is when you check postflop and then raise a bet from another player—is an important weapon in your arsenal. This concept allows you to fight back against players who have position on you, so they cannot c-bet against you with impunity. The threat of a check-raise will make your opponents think twice before betting, particularly when they have a medium-strength draw.

Check-raising must be used at the correct frequency, even though it is a powerful move. You are making the pot bigger when you have a positional disadvantage, which can lead to many difficult situations. Another danger is check-raising on dry flops where it's tough for your opponent to have a hand strong enough to call. This allows them to play perfectly by folding a second-best hand. This principle also comes into play on turns where it is normal to raise your nutted hands. If your check-raise range is not balanced with your check-call range, your opponent will be able to read your hand and fold strong hands that they normally continue betting themselves. You must sometimes check-call a nutted hand worthy of a raise, and sometimes check-raise a weaker hand that is normally in your check-call range.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Implement check-raising into your game by using strong value hands initially. Assess your opponents' reactions and add bluffs to your range if they fold frequently enough. Check-raise dry boards as a bluff if your opponents are folding too often, and adjust if they start to play back at you.

# THREE-BETTING

> "
>
> With three-betting, one of the most important aspects of when you're going to use this as a tool is: you don't want it so that you're three-betting so infrequently that everyone knows when you do it what you have, because then you're going to lose value; because no one's going to continue with you when you do have the aces or the kings.
>
> "

# THREE-BETTING

◇

## TERMS

**LOW-CARD WET BOARD (N.):** Boards with many possible draws, but ones that don't involve high cards, such as 4♥ 3♥ 2♥, 6♠ 7♠ 9♣, and 5♦ 6♣ 2♠.

**THREE-BET (V.):** To reraise another player's open raise preflop, or to reraise over the first raise on a postflop street.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

THREE-BETTING IS WHEN A PLAYER reraises another player's open raise preflop, or when a player reraises over the first raise on a postflop street. The way that players three-bet has evolved over the years— previously, players would only three-bet to reraise premium hands, but now skilled players have a balanced value/bluff range. If you only three-bet your best hands then you become easily readable for your opponents, so it is critical that you have a bluff range as a part of your balanced mixed strategy.

You must always take into account your opponents' tendencies when deciding how to react to getting three-bet. Aggressive players will have a wide range, making it possible to continue in the hand with a wide range yourself. Some players will only ever three-bet premium hands, making it imperative to play a tight conservative strategy against them. Position and stack depth are the other factors to take into account. You should call a three-bet much more often when you are in position, and play tight when out of position. Play a tight strategy when your opponent's three-bet is a large percentage of their reraise

because they are unlikely to fold postflop, which reduces your options to outplay them. Conversely, when the stacks are deep you are able to play a wide continuing range because of the potential reward when you make a nutted hand. Speculative hands such as 7♠ 6♠ and 4♥ 4♠ are suitable hand types to call with if the effective stacks are deep.

Always maintain a balanced strategy with your three-bet range and consider the opening range of the player that you intend to reraise. Three-betting a standard player who is opening under the gun will yield fewer folds because their range is already tight (see Appendix 1). On the other hand, if that player is on the button then they will have many weak hands in their range that cannot profitably continue, meaning that you should three-bet a wide range (see Appendix 2). You should also always keep your three-bet ranges balanced, regardless of who you are three-betting, because if you only ever three-bet premium hands then your opponents will be much less likely to pay you off.

Construct your three-bet range with board coverage in mind. It is important that your opponents know that your range includes all hand types so you can connect with all board textures. You are leaving yourself open to being bluffed off your hand on low-card wet boards if you only three-bet high cards and premium pairs.
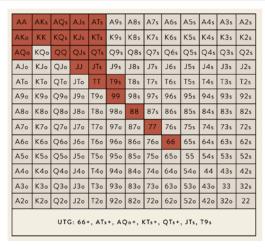
When your opponent calls a three-bet, their continuing range (see Appendix 3) will be stronger than their opening range (see Appendix 2). It is important that you factor this change into your postflop decision-making to devise accurate plans for the remainder of the hand. You can also heavily discount premium pairs from a range that calls a three-bet, as most players will four-bet these hands for value.
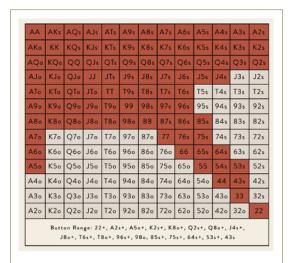
## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Learn to balance your three-bet ranges by incrementally adding bluffs into each range from each position. Do this conservatively to limit the number of difficult situations postflop with your bluff range. Store these ranges on the Equilab app or on a range sheet to help you memorize them for future use and for further adjustment.

◇ Build cash game ranges for defending against three-bets on the Equilab app or on a range sheet. Beginners should start by only four-betting value hands and calling an extremely tight range out of position. You can call more liberally in position and this is the area to start expanding your defending range. More experienced players can add some four-bet bluffs into their range by using hands that block their opponent's three-bet value range, such as A♥ 5♥. With one ace already out of the deck it makes it much less likely that their opponent has pocket aces. (For more on blocking, see Chapter 10: Detecting and Executing the Bluff.)

# CHAPTER EIGHT APPENDIXES

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

UTG: 66+, ATs+, AQo+, KTs+, QTs+, JTs, T9s

**APPENDIX 1**

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

Button Range: 22+, A2s+, A5o+, K2s+, K8o+, Q2s+, Q8o+, J4s+,
J8o+, T6s+, T8o+, 96s+, 98o, 85s+, 75s+, 64s+, 53s+, 43s

**APPENDIX 2**

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

Red: 3-Bet Calling Range
Green: Possible 4-Bet Range/ Blue: Fold

**APPENDIX 3**

*Potential range purely for the purposes of demonstration.*
*Actual ranges are dependent on the player and situation.*

# THREE-BETTING: HAND REVIEW

> " 
> The lesson here really is also that once you've, you know, put a plan together to make a three-bet and it was the right decision, you don't have to continue once you've gotten some resistance from another player.
> "

# THREE-BETTING: HAND REVIEW

## TERMS

**MIN-RAISE (N.):** A raise that is double the previous bet. Preflop this is twice the big blind.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

### THE HAND:

Tobias Reinkemeier opens min-raises with K♦ 5♦ on the button and Daniel three-bets from the small blind with A♥ 10♠. Steven Silverman, in the big blind holding A♣ J♣, cold four-bets.

Daniel folds.

### DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:

A♥ 10♠ stands to be far ahead of a wide button opening range (Appendix 1), but it isn't the right type of hand to only call with, as Daniel will be out of position for the rest of the hand. Three-betting in order to put maximum pressure on the opponent is the best play.
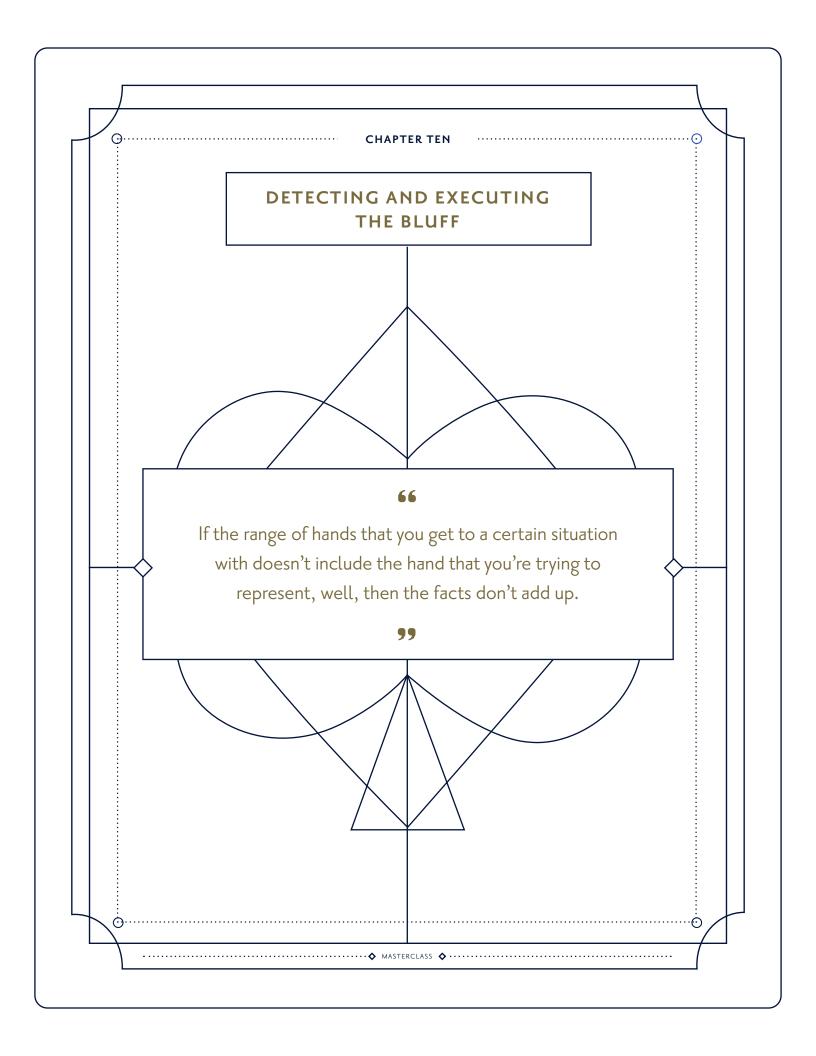
Because of this dynamic where the button has the widest opening range and the small blind is attacking that range with a wide range, the big blind can also four-bet with a wider range than normal. Daniel tries to pick up a read where he might consider making a five-bet bluff but ultimately decides against it. This is not a situation where calling out of position is a realistic play. You should either go with your hand or fold.

### CHAPTER NINE APPENDIXES



| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

Button Range: 22+, A2s+, A5o+, K2s+, K8o+, Q2s+, Q8o+, J4s+, J8o+, T6s+, T8o+, 96s+, 98o, 85s+, 75s+, 64s+, 53s+, 43s

APPENDIX 1

*Potential range purely for the purposes of demonstration. Actual ranges are dependent on the player and situation.*

# DETECTING AND EXECUTING THE BLUFF

> "
>
> If the range of hands that you get to a certain situation with doesn't include the hand that you're trying to represent, well, then the facts don't add up.
>
> "

# DETECTING AND EXECUTING THE BLUFF

---

## SUBCHAPTERS

- MAKE SURE YOUR STORY ADDS UP
- TRACK HOW YOUR STORY CHANGES WITH NEW CARDS
- DOUBLE- AND TRIPLE-BARRELING
- EQUITY AND SEMI-BLUFFING
- BLOCKERS CAN MAKE YOUR BLUFF CREDIBLE
- BLOCKERS IN ACTION
- EXPLOITING CAPPED RANGES
- VALUE-TO-BLUFF RATIOS

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## TERMS

**BARREL (N.):** A bet on a postflop street.

**BARRELING FREQUENCY (N.):** The frequency at which you bet the turn and follow up on the river.

**BRICK (N.):** A turn or river card that is expected to have no impact on the outcome of the hand.

**CAPPED RANGE (N.):** A range that doesn't include many of the strongest hands possible.

**SET (N.):** Three of a kind when the player is holding a pocket pair.

**TRIPS (N.):** Three of a kind when the board is paired and the player holds one card of the same value.

**WET FLOP (N.):** A flop with many possible draws available.

---

## CHAPTER REVIEW

THE KEY TO BLUFFING IS CREDIBILITY. The hand that you are trying to represent when bluffing has to make sense to your opponents. If you bluff without any attempt to represent a credible hand, then you risk your opponents calling with a weak range. Your opponents will be putting you on a range from the beginning of the hand, and if the hand you represent is not in that range then it's unlikely they will believe you. The cards that come on the turn and river can also change how credible your bluff is. You might be representing a hand containing a card that appears on the board. It is critical that you react to this new information available to your opponents by discontinuing your bluff.

Your bluffing range when firing multiple barrels should be balanced. It must contain a selection of strong value hands so your opponents still have a difficult decision when choosing to continue in the hand or fold, even if they suspect you might be bluffing. Some turn cards will drastically increase your equity in the hand when you pick up additional outs to a draw, giving you an opportunity to semi-bluff (Appendix 1). When this happens, increase your barreling frequency, because with more equity in the hand your bluffs don't need to succeed as often.

The cards in your hand also play an important role when deciding on a second barrel. If your hand contains cards that are needed to make many of the strongest hands possible, then it is much less likely that your opponent has a strong holding. These cards are known as blockers. This knowledge means you can fire a second barrel with increased frequency as your opponent won't be able to call as frequently. Blockers are an important part of your bluffing range. One example is when you are holding the ace of a suit where a flush is possible. You know that your

opponent can't have the nuts in this situation, which makes a potential bluff more likely to succeed.

Understanding when your opponent's range is capped allows you extra bluffing opportunities as you know that they are unlikely to have a nutted hand. For example, on a wet flop most players will raise a continuation bet with a set or even two pair, and if the turn card doesn't complete any draws they will usually raise at this point. If the river is a brick, you now know that it's hard for your opponent to have a hand that can call three barrels, making it an ideal situation to attempt a bluff. To counteract this concept against your opponents, you should sometimes

check-call with strong hands to avoid your own range being capped in this situation.

When facing a third barrel you must assess all of the value hands in comparison to possible bluffs and then use the pot odds to come up with the most accurate mathematical conclusion. This information must then be used alongside any metagame details and physical tells for your final decision. This skill can be practiced by using the Equilab app to assess your equity in comparison to the pots odds on offer.

---

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Watch a skilled player on Twitch.tv and focus on their postflop bluffs beyond a c-bet. Try to assess what range their opponent has and if they are using blockers to determine if this is a good opportunity to bluff. This exercise will improve your range assessment skills and make it clearer when you are holding blockers that affect your opponent's value range.
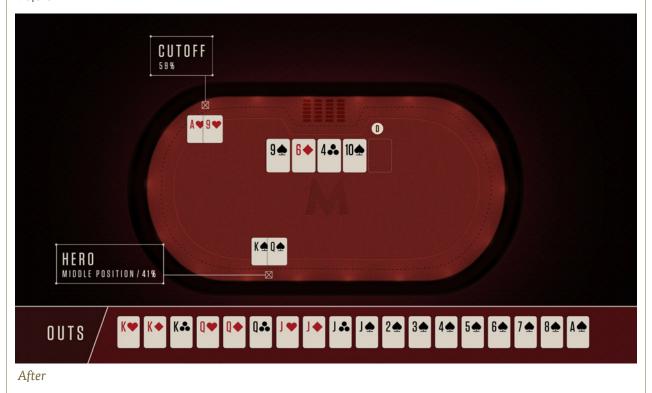
◇ Practice bluffing when you assess your opponent has a capped range postflop. Most players will raise c-bets on wet boards with a set or better, even two pair in many cases. If you arrive at the river having bet both flop and turn, and your opponent only called twice and none of the draws hit, then your opponent has a capped range— making this an opportunity for a three-barrel bluff.

◇ Use the Equilab app to practice assessing ranges when facing a river continuation bet, and when both the flop and turn saw a continuation bet too. Practice adjusting the potential ranges your opponent could have and get a feel for how the equities change. Once you have an estimation of how often you expect to have the best hand, use your knowledge of pot odds from Chapter 6: Game Theory and Math to check if you're getting a good enough price to make the call.

**CHAPTER TEN APPENDIX**



*Before*



*After*

APPENDIX 1

# EXECUTING THE BLUFF: HAND REVIEWS

> "
> The lesson here, in this hand, is really about when you are making tough decisions on the river—separating the number of value combinations you think your opponent can have and then gauging that against the type of player you're against and whether he's capable of bluffing with enough combos to make the call just.
> "

# EXECUTING THE BLUFF: HAND REVIEWS

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## SUBCHAPTERS

- EXPLOITING PLAYER TENDENCIES VS. PHIL HELLMUTH AND DOYLE BRUNSON
- DETECTING VALUE-TO-BLUFF RATIOS VS. PHIL IVEY
- TRIPLE-BARREL BLUFFING VS. BRYN KENNEY

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### Exploiting Player Tendencies vs. Phil Hellmuth and Doyle Brunson

#### SUBCHAPTER TERMS

**BLOCKING BET (N.):** A small bet designed to stop your opponent from making a large bet that is difficult to call.

**GUTSHOT DRAW (N.):** When you have four out of the five cards needed for a particular draw, but are missing one.

**LEAD OUT (V.):** To make the first bet on a postflop street.

**METAGAME (N.):** The integration of your playing history with your opponents into your decision making process.

**NUTTED HAND (N.):** A hand that almost always rates as the best. You can also describe a player holding such a hand as "nutted."

**SET (N.):** Three of a kind when the player is holding a pocket pair.

## THE HAND:

Phil Hellmuth open raises with K♣ 10♠ under the gun and Daniel makes a loose three-bet with 6♣ 2♣. Doyle Brunson cold calls the reraise on the button with J♥ J♣ and Hellmuth also calls.

The flop is 5♠ 7♥ Q♦ and all three players check.

The turn is 4♠ and Hellmuth leads out for almost 60 percent of the pot. Daniel makes a speculative call and Brunson folds the best hand.

The river is 2♠. Hellmuth makes a tiny bet and Daniel puts in a large raise. Hellmuth folds.

## DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:

Daniel decides to attack Hellmuth's early position open for three reasons: (1) The small raise size indicates that the best premium hands are not in his range, (Appendix 1) (2) Daniel and Hellmuth have a metagame going back

many years and Daniel likes to play hands in position against him to utilize his reads, (3) This is a TV game, and loose, unconventional plays are welcomed for the fun that they bring to the game.

Hellmuth's open raise is a mistake because Daniel is able to narrow down his range, making any postflop decision much easier and more accurate.

Brunson's preflop call also allows Daniel to narrow his range, because he would normally four-bet pocket aces and kings, and sometimes pocket queens and ace-king (Appendix 2). Once Brunson makes the call, Daniel thinks Hellmuth has an easy fold but he makes a mistake by continuing in the hand out of position with a marginal hand for the situation.

On the flop, Daniel decides not to c-bet given how strong Brunson's range is; particularly on this flop where A♦ Q♦ is a likely holding.
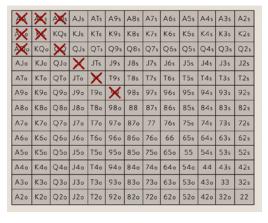
On the turn, Daniel assesses Hellmuth's value range as mainly consisting of top pair type hands (Appendix 3). He doesn't expect him to ever have a straight, and sets are also unlikely given the action. With this information, Daniel calls with his turned gutshot. He knows that he can make a play on the river to steal the pot and also that Brunson will have to fold all but his strongest hands because there is a bet and a raise in front of him in a three-bet pot.

On the river, Hellmuth's bet size gives away the strength of his hand because Daniel knows from their playing history that he would never bet this small with a hand as strong as a set or better. Even knowing this, Daniel thinks that this could be a blocking bet with a hand such as pocket nines, and he assesses that even with a pair of deuces he is still
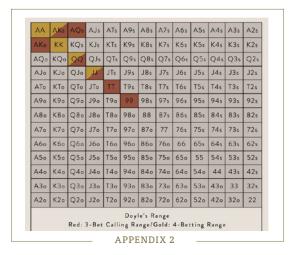
behind Hellmuth's range. This means that calling is not an option and a raise is most likely the only way to win the pot.
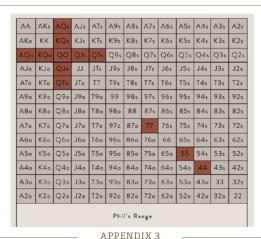
During this assessment, Hellmuth breaks his silence and indicates to Daniel that he shouldn't reach for his highest denomination chips. Daniel reads this as weakness, as he would never say such a thing with a nutted hand. When Daniel makes a large raise, he expects Hellmuth to be able to fold a hand as strong as a set because of the range advantage that he has. With a flush and straight possible, a small set is behind any value-raising hands on the river.

When you have a lot of playing history with an opponent, you should always look to take advantage by playing more hands against them. In this hand, Daniel was able to narrow down Hellmuth's range and ultimately exploit him because of what he has seen in the past.



APPENDIX 1



APPENDIX 2



APPENDIX 3

## Detecting Value-to-Bluff Ratios vs. Phil Ivey

### SUBCHAPTER TERMS

**CHECK-RAISE (V.):** To check postflop and then raise a bet from another player.

**KICKER (N.):** The remaining hole card that does not hit the board when you make a one-pair hand (except pocket pairs).

**OPEN LIMP (N.):** When the first player enters the pot by choice. This doesn't include the blinds, as those are forced bets. Used interchangeably with "open raise."

### THE HAND:

Daniel open limps with 7♣ 5♠ on the button, Phil Ivey completes in the small blind with J♣ 8♠, and Maria Ho checks to see a free flop.

The flop comes Q♦ 4♥ 6♥ and Ivey leads out for half pot. Ho folds and Daniel calls.

The turn is 7♠, giving Daniel second pair to go with his straight draw. Ivey checks and Daniel bets around half pot. Ivey then makes a large raise to more than three times Daniel's bet. Daniel makes the call.

The river is 7♥. Daniel now has trips but there are also flushes and full houses possible. Daniel's kicker is also weak.

Ivey makes a large bet and Daniel makes a difficult call to win the hand when Ivey turns up with a complete bluff.

### DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:

Daniel decides to have an open-limping range—which is unusual—but because the tournament structure is winner-takes-all, and preflop antes are in play, this strategy makes more sense as the players need to play a wider range of hands for these circumstances.

Usually when a player leads out in a multi-way pot they have a strong range, but when Ivey leads out Daniel is aware that he is a player that can do this with a wide range because he's an elite level player. Daniel elects to only call, but raising with an open-ended straight draw would also have been also a valid strategy.

When Ivey checks on the turn and Daniel now has show-down value, Daniel bets to protect his hand and get value from any draws that Ivey might have. When Ivey raises, Daniel puts him on a value range of two pair or better with some bluffs for balance. Although Daniel doesn't have a strong hand, he does beat any draws and bluffs, and he also has the straight draw.

When Ivey bets big on the river, Daniel assesses all the likely value hands and how this range has changed from the turn. Q 6 and Q 4 have now both been counterfeited and can be discounted from the river value range. 5 3 for a straight is also no longer as strong as on the turn because of the possible flush and full houses. This all means that much of Ivey's value check-raise range on the turn can be discounted, although he can still have a number of flushes and full houses. The fact that Daniel holds 7♣ also means that Ivey's full house possibilities are slightly reduced.

When facing a tough call on the river like this, you must simultaneously gauge your opponent's value range and how capable they are of bluffing in that spot.

## Triple-Barrel Bluffing vs. Bryn Kenney

### SUBCHAPTER TERMS

**CHECKED AROUND (ADJ.):** When all players check on a postflop street.

**STRADDLE (N.):** A voluntary bet made after the blinds have been posted but before the hole cards are dealt.

### THE HAND:

Rick Salomon posts a straddle from under the gun. Daniel open raises with Q♦ 3♣ on the button and Bryn Kenney calls in the big blind with A♠ Q♣. Salomon calls with K♦ 8♥.

The flop comes 5♥ 4♣ 5♦ and Kenney checks. Salomon also checks and Daniel makes a half pot c-bet. Kenney calls and Salomon folds.

The turn is 8♠. Kenney checks and Daniel makes another c-bet. Kenney calls again.

The river is 2♥ and Kenney checks. Daniel completes the three-barrel bluff by overbetting and Kenney folds the best hand.

### DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:

Daniel opts to open raise with a trash hand to attempt to steal the bigger than normal starting pot because of the straddle. Three-betting A♠ Q♣ against a button raise would be a normal play but Kenney elects to play deceptively and only call. With such great pot odds on offer Salomon has an easy call with a marginal hand.

On the 5♥ 4♣ 5♦ flop Daniel assesses that Kenney has a range disadvantage due to his preflop call. This factor combined with being out of position will make the hand difficult to play.

When Kenney check-calls the flop c-bet, his hope is that the turn is checked around and he will still have the best hand on the river.

On the turn, the usual play would be to check behind and give up on the pot. However, the turn card hits Daniel's range more than it hits Kenney's, so he decides to continue with his bluff having a large range advantage on this board.

On the river, Daniel elects to overbet the pot to make it difficult for small overpairs to call on a dangerous board where so many nutted hands are possible. A smaller bet would run too much risk of getting called in this situation.
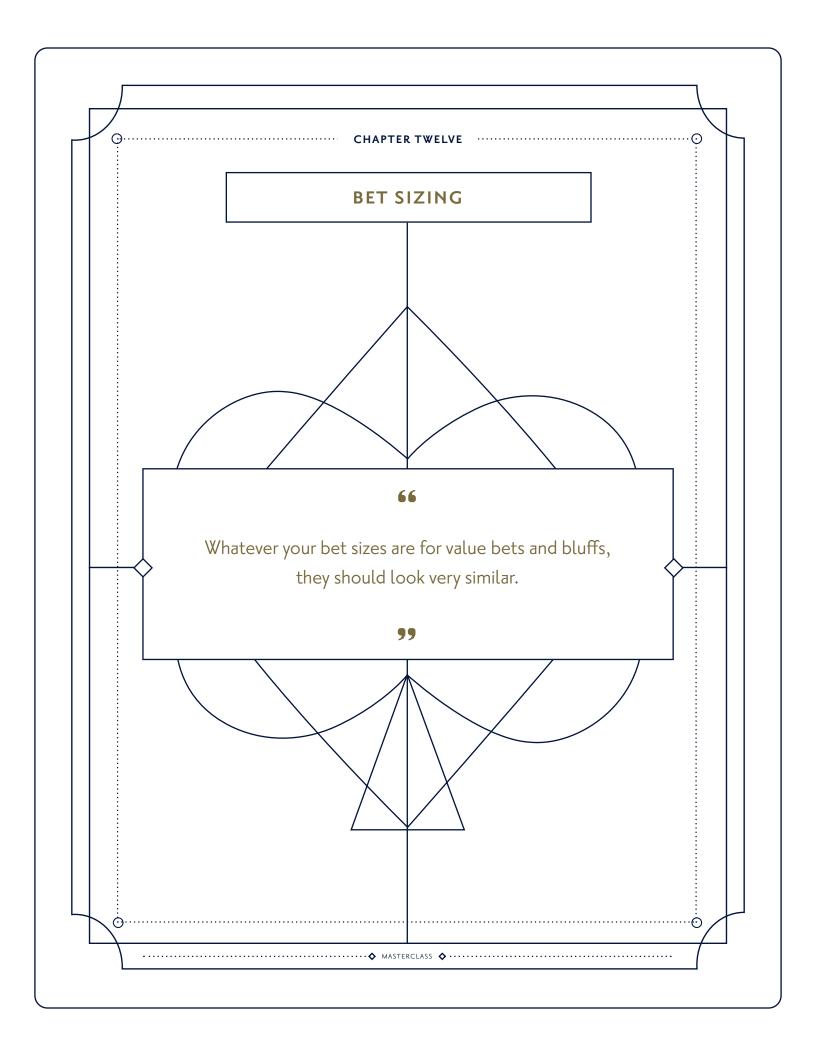
When deciding on whether or not to continue bluffing on the turn and river, you must assess which cards are better for which player's range. In many situations, a single c-bet on the flop will not be enough to steal the pot.

# BET SIZING

> "
>
> Whatever your bet sizes are for value bets and bluffs,
> they should look very similar.
>
> "

# BET SIZING

◇

## CHAPTER REVIEW

**A**VALUE BET IS MADE IN THE HOPE that your opponent calls with a second-best hand—which makes you money. This is in comparison to a bluff, in which you hope your opponent folds. You make money in poker when these bets are successful. The size of these bets is crucial to maximizing your profit. On dry boards, for example, your bet sizes should be smaller as the risk of allowing your opponent to draw is negligible. On wet boards, the risk is severe and so bigger bets should be made. Even taking this advice into account, your bluffs should be the minimum possible size to get the job done. The bigger the bet size, the higher success rate is needed to break even on your bluff. Smaller bet sizes can often be successful with a much lower risk.

Your bet sizing should also be consistent, with your value bets and bluffs being similar sizes in the same situations. Adjustments can still be made based on your opponents, as weak players will not understand what your strategy is. Increasing the size of your value bets against weak players is key to maintaining a high win rate. You should always keep an eye on your opponent's bet sizings, as they may show a pattern that indicates their strength of hand. These patterns are not always obvious, but once you pick up a solid read you can make adjustments to your strategy against them.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Practice adjusting your bet sizes for both value bets and bluffs against weak opponents who won't counter-adjust.Make your value bets bigger for extra profit and your bluffs smaller to reduce the risk-to-reward ratio. Optimizing your bet sizing is essential to maximize your win rate. But beginners should avoid trying to exploit the toughest opponents because you might be too easily read.

◇ Watch a skilled player on Twitch.tv and focus on how they adjust their bet sizes against each player type. This will give you added insight into the adjustment process to improve your decisions.

# OVERBETTING

> " What condition has to be present for an overbet to be a possibility? You have to have your opponent's range as being very, very strong—except yours is slightly stronger. "

# OVERBETTING

## TERMS

**DRY BOARD (N.):** When the table's shared cards do not present many opportunities for drawing hands. For example, a "rainbow" flop with three different suits, which does not open up the possibility of a flush draw.

**STICKY PLAYER (N.):** An opponent who usually doesn't fold marginal hands in the hopes of completing their draw.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

AN OVERBET IS A BET THAT IS LARGER than the current pot size. Traditionally, bet sizes are between 33 and 100 percent of the pot. Changes in strategy, driven by high-stakes players, have made the overbet a common weapon among skilled players with the knowledge that it puts their opponents into tough situations.

You must factor in your opponent's range when you make an overbet. If you have a nutted hand and want to get maximum value, you must be sure your opponent has a strong range so they can call the large bet frequently enough. (If their range isn't strong, they'll just fold to your overbet.) When overbetting for value, make sure that you don't have a hand that would block the hands your opponent is more likely to call with. With a hand such as top set on a dry board, you block top pair combinations, making it more likely that your opponent has a second pair type hand that cannot call any large bet on the river.

When you are bluffing, always consider whether your opponent has many nutted hands in their range that they are unlikely to fold to any bet size. If this is the case, then your overbet bluff might get called too often to be profitable. Blockers are also important when overbetting as a bluff. Ideally, you want to overbet when you block the strong hands that your opponent can consider calling with.
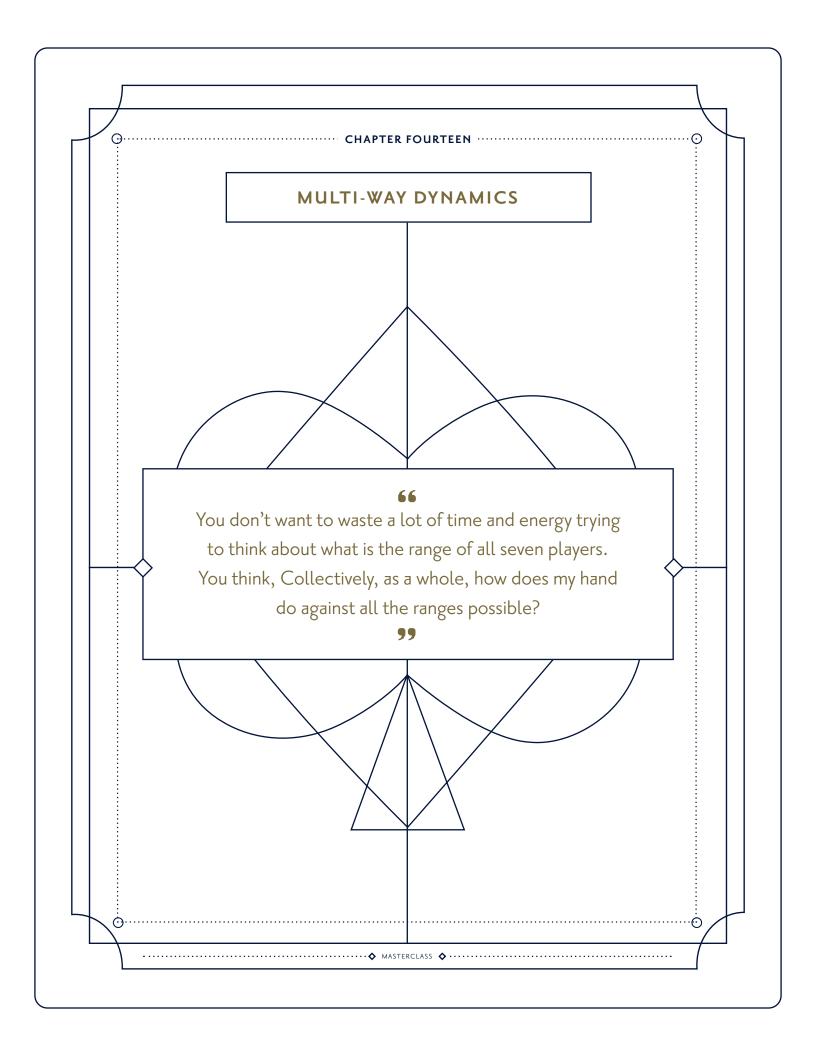
Your overbet range should always be balanced with value hands and bluffs to maintain the maximum profitability of this bet type against good players. You can make adjustments against bad players when overbetting for value as they are likely to pay you off more frequently.

When playing against opponents you know to be balanced, use the folding frequency formula—**Bet / (Pot + Bet)**—to assess how often you must call when facing an overbet yourself. Keep in mind that at low stakes many players will only ever overbet for value. If in doubt, err on the side of folding too frequently rather than paying off your opponent with a worse hand. Because overbetting is a complicated strategy with a lot of potential for expensive mistakes, making overbets should be reserved until you have mastered the fundamentals of poker.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Watch a skilled player on Twitch.tv and practice assessing all ranges involved when an overbet takes place. Overbets have the potential to turn into an expensive mistake when used at the wrong time, so you must learn to assess ranges accurately before attempting the concept yourself. Both you and your opponent must have a strong range, but yours must be stronger.

# MULTI-WAY DYNAMICS

> "
> You don't want to waste a lot of time and energy trying
> to think about what is the range of all seven players.
> You think, Collectively, as a whole, how does my hand
> do against all the ranges possible?
> "

# Multi-Way Dynamics

## SUBCHAPTERS

- BETS BECOME MORE POLARIZED
- PLAYERS ARE MORE HONEST
- INCORPORATE SEMI-BLUFFS INTO MULTI-WAY POTS
- EXPLOIT OPENINGS TO APPLY PRESSURE ON OPPONENTS
- CAPITALIZE ON THE OPPORTUNITY TO BLUFF WHEN IN POSITION
- DON'T SLOW PLAY AS MUCH
- STEER AWAY FROM PUTTING OPPONENTS ON SPECIFIC RANGES
- FOCUS ON HANDS THAT ARE EASIER TO PLAY
- EXTRACT EXTRA VALUE AT THE LOWER STAKES
- VARIANCE IN MULTI-WAY POTS

## CHAPTER REVIEW

MULTI-WAY POTS are pots that have three or more players. They require a different strategy than heads-up pots, where you only have a single opponent, because with more players in the hand it is more likely that at least one player has a strong hand. This means that bets in multi-way pots are more polarized to strong hands and (occasionally) worthless hands. The medium-strength hands will usually be played more passively. The tendency to see strong hands more frequently in multi-way pots makes players a lot more honest than you usually see in heads-up pots. Bets will tend to mean what they are representing. You can incorporate semi-bluffs into your betting range in multi-way pots to avoid being so easily read. This way—with the increased danger of being up against a strong hand—you are bluffing with plenty of equity and will often finish with the best hand if you hit your draw.

Even though multi-way situations can be dangerous, you can still seize opportunities to push stronger hands out of the pot with a bluff, leaving you to play against the perceived weakest hand or player. For this to work, your bluffs need to be viewed as strong value bets more often and you must be keenly aware of what your opponents' ranges are. You can take the initiative when you are in position and nobody bets, because it is unlikely that anybody has a strong hand. If, for example, you are in a six-way pot on the button and nobody has bet, then you can bet knowing that if anybody had a strong hand or a monster draw, they likely would have bet themselves. Even if you are called, you can continue aggressively on the turn and river knowing that your opponents have weak ranges.

Daniel doesn't recommend slow playing as a regular part of your strategy in multi-way pots because you may forfeit value in a situation where it is more likely somebody has a strong hand. If you don't bet and your opponent doesn't bite then no money went into the pot and you win less—and in multi-way situations you're missing out on a lot because there's a higher chance someone has a hand they can call with. Multi-way pots are also more common at lower stakes where players are less skilled and likely to pay you off. If you're playing low stakes against less skilled opponents, bluffing is rarely a good idea because weak players do not generally fold enough. Your focus should always be toward value betting rather than trying to make sophisticated plays.

Reading players' ranges is more difficult in multi-way pots because as more players enter the pot, the pot odds get bigger, which offers a better price to ever wider ranges. Daniel advocates not trying to pinpoint an exact range in these situations; rather, you should just consider how your hand is doing overall against other possible hands.
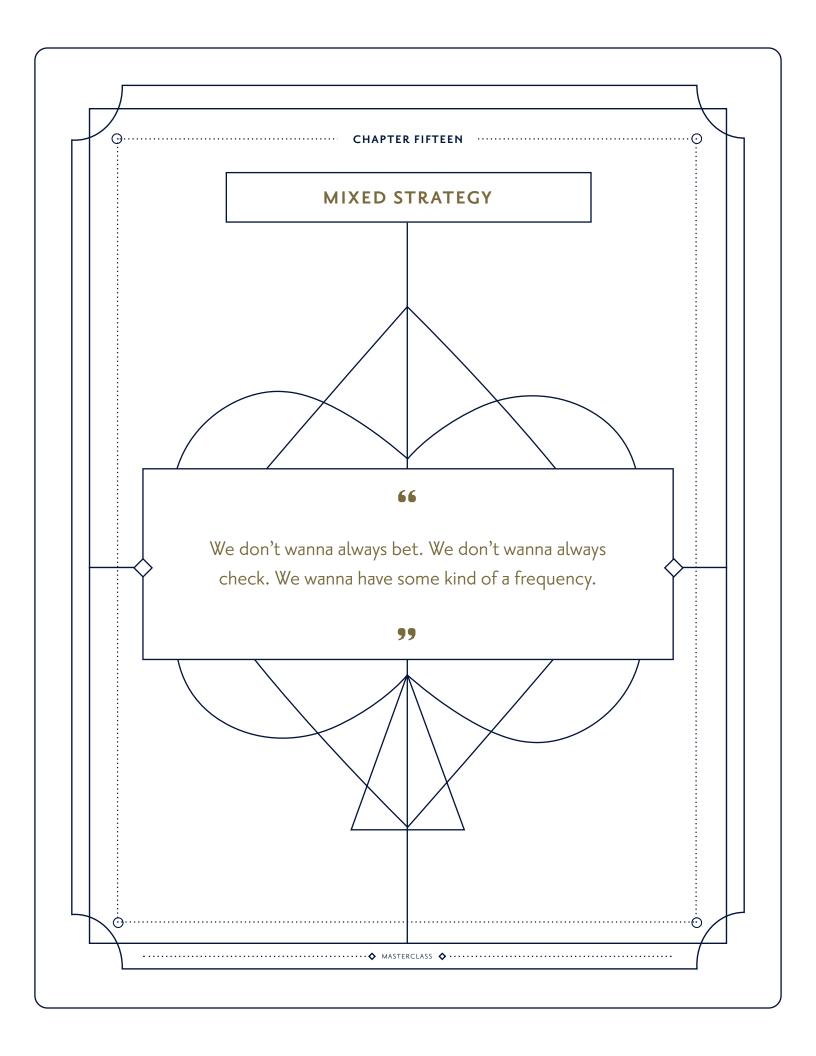
You also need to be aware of how ranges change as more players enter the pot. With more players in the pot, the value of speculative hands rises because hands such as 9♦ 8♦ and 2♠ 2♣ are either extremely weak or they make a nutted hand. High cards, on the other hand, go down in value because they mostly make one pair, which isn't strong in a multi-way situation. Because premium hands are often out drawn in multi-way pots, the variance you will experience is much more extreme than in heads-up pots. You should always remain objective when you go through periods of your overpairs getting cracked on wet boards in multi-way pots, as this is perfectly normal and unavoidable.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Watch a skilled player on Twitch.tv and assess how much they are adjusting their ranges in multi-way pots. You must play much more conservatively as more players enter the pot, as the chance that somebody will make a nutted hands increases dramatically. If you are unsure about the strength of your hand, err on the side of playing tight when faced with a multi-way situation.

# MIXED STRATEGY

> "
>
> We don't wanna always bet. We don't wanna always check. We wanna have some kind of a frequency.
>
> "

# MIXED STRATEGY

## SUBCHAPTERS

- MASTER THE FUNDAMENTALS BEFORE INCORPORATING A MIXED STRATEGY

- UNDERSTANDING BOARD COVERAGE

- INCREASE BOARD COVERAGE WITH HANDS THAT HAVE POSTFLOP POTENTIAL

- LETTING PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT YOUR BOARD COVERAGE
- DETERMINE YOUR MIXED STRATEGY OFF THE FELT

- HOW TO RANDOMIZE YOUR MIXED STRATEGY

- ADAPT MIXED STRATEGY BASED ON YOUR OPPONENTS

- INCORPORATING RANGE BALANCE INTO YOUR MIXED STRATEGY

- TEACH PEOPLE TO FEAR YOUR CHECKS

- DON'T FOCUS ON SINGLE-HAND RESULTS

- MIXED STRATEGY AND METAGAME

## TERMS

**DEUCES (N.) :** A pair of twos.

**GET RUN OVER (V.):** To be aggressively pushed out of many pots.

**SHOWDOWN (N.):** The moment after the final round of betting when the last players left in a hand reveal their cards to determine the winner(s).

**SHOW DOWN (V.):** To physically reveal your cards to your opponents.

**SLOWPLAY (V.):** To refrain from betting or raising in order to trap your opponent. Also, to give your opponent a chance to make a better second-best hand in order to extract more value.

**SPECULATIVE HAND (N.):** Hands such as suited connectors and small pocket pairs. They don't make a good hand very often, but when they do it's likely to be the best hand.

**TREYS (N.):** A pair of threes.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

A MIXED STRATEGY—meaning that you vary the way you play a hand across games—is essential to preventing your opponents from easily reading you. You have to be willing to cut your own throat sometimes and make plays you know are suboptimal in order to create your mixed strategy. For example, when you are facing an open raise to your right and you have a mediocre hand, you should switch between three-betting, calling, and folding, depending on any reads you have on your opponent. This mixed strategy will prevent your opponent from being able to discount certain hands from your range and make you harder to play against.

A strong mixed strategy is developed over time. Beginners should play a more conservative style and slowly change strategy one part at a time, so as not to self-destruct with expensive mistakes. Because a mixed strategy will force you into more difficult situations, you should only add these extra layers to your game as you become comfortable with doing so.

Board coverage is where your range is constructed to hit all possible board textures. This means that your opponent will not be able to apply pressure in situations where your range is unlikely to have connected with the board. If you can always have a nutted hand in a given situation, then your opponent will not be able to take advantage of you.

To guarantee board coverage you should incorporate more speculative hands into your range. These are hands such as 8♠ 7♠ or 2♥ 2♦. These hand types will not make a strong hand frequently, but when they do it will most often be the best hand. You will also not be in too many difficult situations because your hand will mostly be very weak or very strong.

You should always be aware of how your board coverage is perceived by your opponents. If you are not showing down any speculative hands, your range might still be perceived as tight. If, however, you have shown down some of these hands, then you can make an adjustment to a tighter range to exploit your opponents. Daniel warns against unnecessarily showing your cards to your opponents because it's free information that will help them to adjust against you.

You should determine your mixed strategy away from the table. How you randomize and incorporate these frequencies into your game cannot be done during actual play, because it's too complicated. It's also more important to get this part of your strategy right in online games because of the lack of physical tells.

There are many different ways to randomize your mixed strategy. One example is to use your watch. For a strategy that requires you to make one play half of the time, and a different one the other half of the time, you can use the second hand or digits to choose which play you will make by using the clock face as a pie chart and visualizing the percentages. This is completely random and your opponent won't be able to pick up a read on you. You can also create a system that ties into the suits and number values on the cards on show. Additionally, you can do this by feel. If you have already checked twice in a 50:50 situation, then betting is fine. Always be aware that you should be mixing up your strong hands too, for balance. For example, if you are checking A K on a 10 5 2 flop half of the time, you should also be doing the same with A A and K K.

It is important for your opponents to perceive you as always having the possibility of having a nutted hand, or else you can get run over. For example, if it's likely that you can only have one pair at best, your opponent can exploit you by making big bets that you cannot profitably call. To counter this possibility, you should slow play more strong hands. This can be done by feel, utilizing reads that you have on your opponents. For example, if an opponent is highly likely to play aggressively, then you can refrain from raising until the river with a nutted hand. If they are likely to not believe you, then you can attempt a check-raise. It is important to be able to adjust your range frequencies based on your opponents. For example, against a player who doesn't fold to continuation bets very often, you should lower your betting frequency and raise your checking frequency when you don't have a hand worth any value. This also means that you should raise your betting frequency when you have a strong hand because you gain additional value.

As part of a mixed strategy it is essential to make your opponents fear your checks. By always having the possibility of strong hands in your range, your opponents will not be able to take full advantage when you check the weak part of your range.

Earlier in Daniel's career, he would always bet a hand like Q J on a J 6 2 board to protect his hand. Now, he recommends checking some percentage of the time as part of a mixed strategy, because always betting top pair here will make your checking range extremely weak. The downside to this strategy is that sometimes your opponent will be able to catch a card to make a better hand when they would have folded to a bet. But that is just the price you pay for a high-level balanced mixed strategy; in the long run it will make you a tougher opponent to play against.

Having a stronger checking range will open up new profitable opportunities. Once your opponents understand that you are capable of checking a strong hand, you can adjust by making raises with weak hands to exploit them.

Sometimes you will make plays that go wrong and feel like a mistake. You must remember that this is a part of your overall mixed strategy. Always think about poker in terms of your overall range, instead of a single instance.

In order to make people afraid of both your betting and checking ranges, you must bet less often.

Your opponents will always be paying attention to your strategy. So if, for example, you have already shown down hands where you checked a strong hand on the flop, then you don't need to do this as often in the future. Checking strong hands is an essential part of a mixed strategy, but it forgoes value. Once your opponents have seen this part of your strategy you can switch to a more value-oriented game.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Developing a mixed strategy is a long process that beginners will find difficult. Once you are comfortable with the fundamentals of the game and are ready to start implementing this into your overall strategy, you should do it in clear, distinct stages. One recommended area to begin with is your cash game range when there is a single raiser and you have the opportunity to three-bet or call in position. In your notebook, make a default mixed strategy for when you are on the button and there is a single raise in front of you. For all the hands that you either call or three-bet, decide how often you are going to take the opposite approach. Take a more conservative stance at this stage and still focus on the more value-oriented play. Your aims for this exercise are to (1) become comfortable with the idea of playing the same hand different ways, as it is easy to autopilot and revert to your old strategy, and (2) decide on a randomizing process.

◇ Using the worksheet on the following page, make a default mixed strategy for when you are on the button and there is a single raise in front of you. Write in the bet size and perceived range of each player. For all the hands that you either call or 3-bet with, decide how often you are going to take the opposite approach. Take a more conservative stance at this stage and still focus on the more value-orientated play. Your aims for this exercise are to (1) become comfortable with the idea of playing the same hand different ways, as it is easy to autopilot and revert to your old strategy, and (2) decide on a randomizing process. Note that you can also do this using the Equilab app, but doing it by hand will help your memorization process.

◇ Then, during your playing sessions, choose a single player at your table and try to determine if they are playing a mixed strategy. If they are not, repeat this exercise until you encounter a player who does. Once you see a skilled player using a mixed strategy, watch for any adjustments they make after they have shown down hands that are not part of their value strategy. You must improve your skill at observing how your opponents change their strategies. But to begin with, observing only a single player will help you focus. You can also watch a player on Twitch.tv to see how they adjust their own mixed strategy based on what hands they show down. Learning how to read a player's hand range once is not enough. You must be alert to any changes and be ready to adjust yourself.

# HAND RANGE CHARTS

## Chart 1

POSITION _____     ACTION _____

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

## Chart 2

POSITION _____     ACTION _____

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

## Chart 3

POSITION _____     ACTION _____

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

## Chart 4

POSITION _____     ACTION _____

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

## Chart 5

POSITION _____     ACTION _____

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

## Chart 6

POSITION _____     ACTION _____

| AA | AKs | AQs | AJs | ATs | A9s | A8s | A7s | A6s | A5s | A4s | A3s | A2s |
|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| AKo | KK | KQs | KJs | KTs | K9s | K8s | K7s | K6s | K5s | K4s | K3s | K2s |
| AQo | KQo | QQ | QJs | QTs | Q9s | Q8s | Q7s | Q6s | Q5s | Q4s | Q3s | Q2s |
| AJo | KJo | QJo | JJ | JTs | J9s | J8s | J7s | J6s | J5s | J4s | J3s | J2s |
| ATo | KTo | QTo | JTo | TT | T9s | T8s | T7s | T6s | T5s | T4s | T3s | T2s |
| A9o | K9o | Q9o | J9o | T9o | 99 | 98s | 97s | 96s | 95s | 94s | 93s | 92s |
| A8o | K8o | Q8o | J8o | T8o | 98o | 88 | 87s | 86s | 85s | 84s | 83s | 82s |
| A7o | K7o | Q7o | J7o | T7o | 97o | 87o | 77 | 76s | 75s | 74s | 73s | 72s |
| A6o | K6o | Q6o | J6o | T6o | 96o | 86o | 76o | 66 | 65s | 64s | 63s | 62s |
| A5o | K5o | Q5o | J5o | T5o | 95o | 85o | 75o | 65o | 55 | 54s | 53s | 52s |
| A4o | K4o | Q4o | J4o | T4o | 94o | 84o | 74o | 64o | 54o | 44 | 43s | 42s |
| A3o | K3o | Q3o | J3o | T3o | 93o | 83o | 73o | 63o | 53o | 43o | 33 | 32s |
| A2o | K2o | Q2o | J2o | T2o | 92o | 82o | 72o | 62o | 52o | 42o | 32o | 22 |

# MIXED STRATEGY: HAND REVIEW

> " You have to have a mixed line of strategies
> to keep your opponents guessing. "

# MIXED STRATEGY: HAND REVIEW

♣

• AVOID MAKING YOURSELF EASILY
READ: TONY G VS. ESFANDIARI

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**CHAPTER REVIEW**

**D**ANIEL REVIEWS A HAND played between two of the most recognizable players in the world—Tony G and Antonio Esfandiari—to illustrate the importance of having a mixed strategy.

**THE HAND:**
Esfandiari makes an open raise from the cutoff with a quality hand—`A♦` `J♥`—and Tony G calls on the button, in position, with `K♦` `2♦`. The players in the blinds both fold.

The flop comes `5♣` `2♠` `9♥` and Esfandiari makes a continuation bet with his overcards. Tony G with bottom pair makes the call, as he usually does with any pair on the flop.

The turn is `3♣`. Esfandiari has four out of the five cards he needs for a straight, but he's missing one in the middle—a gutshot straight draw—and he has overcards. Even though he now has additional equity, because he has the possibility of getting a straight on the river, he decides to take a more passive line and checks. The greater the chance of making the best hand on later streets, the less frequently your bluff needs to work to be a profitable bet. Tony G, while not holding a particularly strong hand, bets for protection and Esfandiari quickly calls.

The river is `9♠`, which pairs the board. Esfandiari checks to Tony G, who then begins to assess whether or not he can make a profitable value bet with bottom pair. After a short think he decides to check back and immediately realizes that he should have bet. He says this out loud and Esfandiari not only agrees with him, but also says he would have made the call.

**DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:**
Warning: Tony G's preflop call was a lot looser than is generally recommended!

When Esfandiari makes his c-bet, he needs to consider factors such as the dry board, his opponent's playing style, and the fact that `A` `J` is the best hand much of the time. Tony G is known to be a very loose player who plays ranges wide enough to hit all possible board textures. He is also very "sticky," which means that he frequently calls bets with weak hands to see if his opponent shows weakness by checking on later streets. This will allow him to steal the pot with the worst hand on some occasions.

On the turn, Esfandiari takes Tony G's style of play into account and checks. Against a different player it might make sense to bet again, but not necessarily in this case. Esfandiari knows that you can't bet the flop with overcards only to give up on the turn every time you miss. Once Tony G bets, Esfandiari makes the call, as he knows he might still have the best hand against such a loose player.
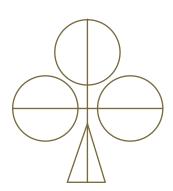
If you hold `A` `J` in this spot, you shouldn't always bet the flop and check the turn or you'll become easy to read.
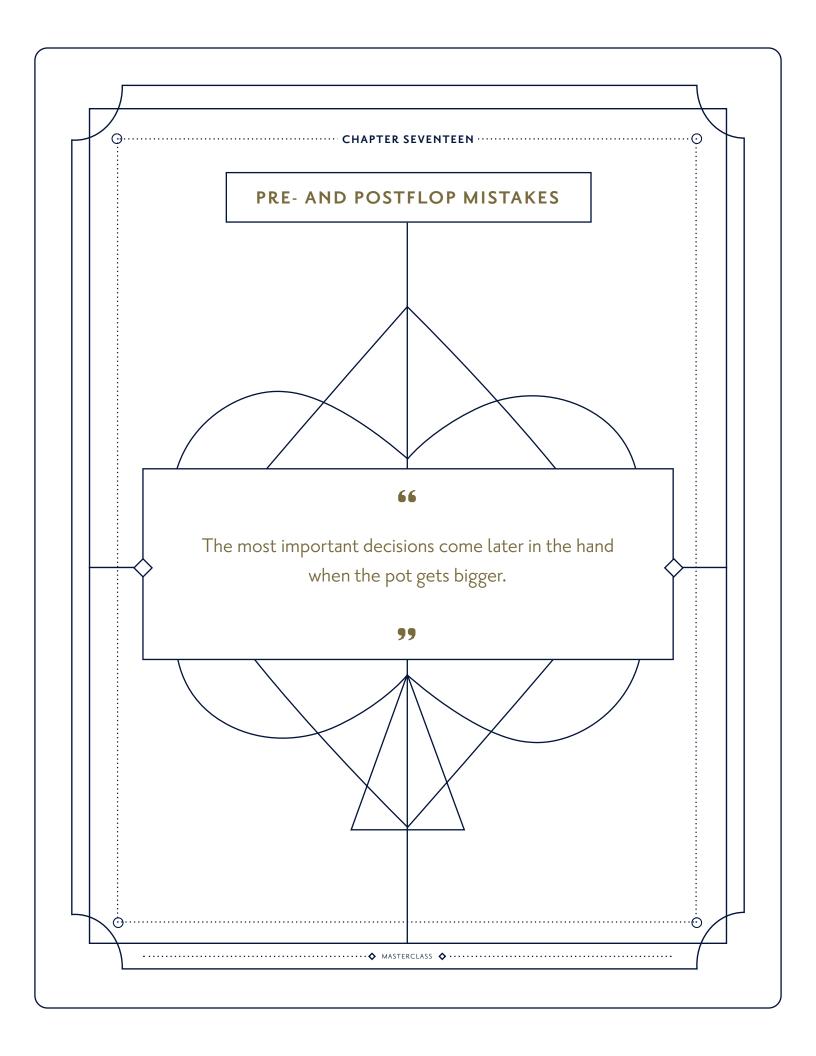
If you bet the flop, you have to bet some turns. To decide when, you use a variety of factors, such as picking up a draw, as you see in this hand. Sometimes you should bet both flop and turn, and sometimes you can check-call and check the turn to reassess your situation. In this particular hand, the turn 3♣ changed little, so check-calling actually made a lot of sense for Esfandiari. The lesson here is that you have to take different lines with the same hand.

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## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Tony G admits he made a mistake by not betting the river. This is a great example of a thin-value bet where he doesn't expect Esfandiari to call him too often, but it will happen frequently enough for him to show a profit. When you play a mixed strategy, you will appear more aggressive. This means you are more likely to have your bets called, therefore you should bet more often. Find footage of world-class players in top-level events and look for hands where you see a bet in a situation you would have checked based on thinking your hand isn't strong enough. Also, try to spot players who use a mixed strategy, and those who don't. Can you appreciate who is the toughest opponent to play against?

◇ Review a hand you played that duplicates the action from the analyzed hand. Using the suggestions that Daniel gives, come up with alternative lines that give you several options when facing the same situation. Daniel doesn't talk about what he would do if there were any raises postflop; include these possibilities in your analysis and see if your conclusions match those of your fellow students in The Hub.

# PRE- AND POSTFLOP MISTAKES

> "
> The most important decisions come later in the hand when the pot gets bigger.
> "

# PRE- AND POSTFLOP MISTAKES

◇

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## SUBCHAPTERS

- PREFLOP MISTAKES: LIMPING IN

- HEADS-UP POSTFLOP MISTAKES: FOLDING TOO OFTEN

- POSTFLOP MISTAKES: GETTING ATTACHED TO PREMIUM HANDS

- RIVER MISTAKES: CALLING TOO OFTEN AND MISSING VALUE

- THE MORE RAISING THAT HAPPENS, THE STRONGER YOUR HAND NEEDS TO BE

- DON'T FALL PREY TO REVERSE IMPLIED ODDS

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## TERMS

**BACKDOOR DRAW (N.):** When you have no draw on the flop but the turn card can potentially give you one.

**COLD CALL (V.):** To call a single preflop raise.

**KICKER (N.):** The remaining hole card that does not hit the board when you make a one-pair hand (except pocket pairs).

**LIMP IN (V.):** To enter the pot before the flop by simply matching the big blind's bet, rather than raising.

**REVERSE IMPLIED ODDS (N.):** When you stand to lose money if you hit your draw.

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## CHAPTER REVIEW

**W**HILE BOTH PREFLOP AND POSTFLOP STRATEGY are critical to your success as a poker player, post-flop decisions have a much greater impact on your win rate. Both tight and loose preflop strategies are equally valid, but how well you perform postflop will dictate the level of success you achieve. This is because the pot size grows geometrically toward later streets where mistakes are amplified with the bigger bet sizes.

Limping in to see many flops is a common mistake among beginners. These players end up playing far too many hands, without taking position into account, which is a losing strategy overall. Raising all of your range preflop makes you a much tougher player for your opponents to face, and this strategy also allows you to win pots without a fight.

Folding too often in heads-up situations is a common mistake that improving players frequently make. You must be prepared to calls bets with weak hands in a heads-up situation because your opponents will c-bet a wide range, meaning that you must also continue with a wide range yourself. Often, ace-high will be the best hand on the flop, and if you have a backdoor draw you can pick up additional equity on the turn, which might offer a bluff opportunity to steal the pot. For example, if you call a c-bet with A♥ 10♥ on a K♥ 7♣ 2♦ flop you might pick up a flush draw on the turn—and you might have the best hand some of the time.

Another common mistake seen in low-stakes games is when players get too attached to overpairs on dangerous boards. The range of hands that players cold call a preflop raise with gives them an advantage on draw-heavy boards because, in a typical opening range, earlier position opens have less speculative hands that hit these flops. Hands such as pocket aces go down in value in this situation, and you must play a more conservative strategy to avoid putting too many chips in the pot with what is still only a one-pair hand.

You must take extra care with river situations, as the pot is usually big if there was betting on every street. A player who bets on the river will usually have a strong hand, and you are open to a big mistake if you misread their range and call with a medium-strength hand. This concept also applies to value betting. The profit from having your big river bets called is important to your win rate. Missing these opportunities will heavily impact your profit. The ranges that appear in these situations get stronger with the more raises that happen throughout the hand. You must adjust your strategy to take this into account as the pot grows in order to avoid paying off your opponent with a weaker hand.

Reverse implied odds are where you stand to lose money postflop even when you make your hand, in comparison to implied odds where you stand to win more. Reverse implied odds apply the further away from the nuts you are—for example, if you are considering calling large bets with a small straight draw when a flush and full house are possible. While making a small straight draw might be a winning proposition in some cases, if lots of chips go into the pot you will almost certainly be up against a better hand. Implied odds and reverse implied odds always apply when there are more streets to play.

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## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Review hands where you lost your entire stack with an overpair and the chips didn't go in preflop. Losing too many chips with a one-pair hand will severely impact your win rate, and you must learn when to get out of the pot in such situations. Watching Twitch.tv, look for hands where the player folds their overpair postflop because of aggression from their opponent. Use your learnings to improve your handling of overpairs.

◇ Review hands where you either called a river continuation bet and lost, or failed to bet the river and won. River continuation bets usually indicate a strong range and calling too lightly is a mistake. If you fail to bet the river in situations where you had the best hand, you are missing out on too much value and must bet for value more aggressively.

◇ Read this summary of reverse implied odds to augment your knowledge. This will improve your understanding of when a draw is a losing proposition. Then study situations where reverse implied odds apply. For example: When facing a three-bet preflop with a hand such as K♠ J♦. If you call and make one pair, you are likely to have a worse kicker when your opponent is betting. This is the opposite of implied odds where you expect to have the best hand if you hit. Another example: Pocket nines facing a three-bet of a few hundred big blinds with only your three big blind raises and the blinds in the pot already. Here the risk-to-reward ratio is too bad to continue with even a call to see a flop, especially if your stack is deep enough.

# TOURNAMENT STRATEGY: EARLY AND MIDDLE STAGES

> "
> The number one mistake I see tournament players make…is you see a player who has a chip lead or a very big stack and then just blows it off, bluffing, trying to win the tournament too early.
> "

# TOURNAMENT STRATEGY: EARLY AND MIDDLE STAGES

## CHAPTER REVIEW

**D**ANIEL HAS ALWAYS FOUND TOURNAMENT POKER to be more exciting than cash games, because in tournaments you can actually win a trophy or a big prize, whereas cash games are more of a grind, like real work. One of the biggest differences between cash and tournament games is the diversity of stack sizes, and it is essential to account for this when determining the best strategy for a tournament.

Daniel advises you to play conservatively early on in a tournament, before the antes kick in, because the early stage of a tournament is more about survival than about getting value. You can't win the tournament in the early stage, but you can lose all your chips. Daniel explains how doubling up your chip stack is not as valuable early on due to ICM—Independent Chip Model—which affects the value of each chip as the tournament progresses. If, however, your opponents are all playing extremely tight as well, then it makes sense to open up your game as a counterstrategy and steal their chips. Just remember: it's a marathon, not a sprint.

The hand types that are best with the deeper stacks early on are those with the most postflop potential. Suited connectors and pocket pairs—hands such as 7♥ 6♥ and 3♠ 3♣—are great hands that carry minimal risk for a big reward. A hand like A♥ 9♠, by contrast, has more equity but much less potential. Later on, when your only realistic options preflop are all in or fold, offsuit aces can play great as shoves from late position with shallow stacks, but during the early stage they can get you into some trouble.

The speed at which the size of the blinds increases should inform how aggressive you are in the early stages. In a turbo tournament, where the blinds increase quickly, it is more important to focus on value than survival.

One of the biggest mistakes beginner players make is to build a large chip stack and then blow it off needlessly when trying to win the tournament too early. Patience and discipline are key if you want to win in large field events.

The middle stages are where the fun really starts. The players at your table will have varying chips stacks, which handcuffs you in some ways concerning your strategy. For example, with many short-stacked opponents still to act, you must tighten up your opening range as it is likely they will be three-betting a wide range in the hopes of doubling up. You'll now have to fold many hands that you'd usually open from each position, otherwise you will be forced to fold too frequently when you face a shove. A speculative hand type such as 8♠ 6♠, which before would have been a fine open from middle position, is now a clear fold

when you have short-stacked opponents to your left, as you cannot call a shove. High-card hands, such as A 10, go up in value because they are more suitable for calling a three-bet all in from a short-stack.

If you have a big stack at the middle stage, you should be looking to protect it rather than act as the table bully. Once you get to the bubble stage this big stack will increase in value, as you can apply a lot of pressure to short-stacked opponents. If there is another big stack at your table, you need to play smarter when up against them.

The middle stages are when the "danger zone" comes into play. If you find yourself with less than 20 big blinds in the middle stages, you need to adjust your strategy significantly. You no longer have the benefit of playing speculative hands to see how the flop comes out. Instead, you should tighten your range to stronger hands and look to go all in to steal pots and build your stack.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Read MTT Strategy: The Early Stage. This guide written by the PokerStars Poker School will help you to revise the concepts learned in the class.

◇ Read *Moorman's Book of Poker* by Chris Moorman. Moorman is the most successful online tournament player of all time with $11 million in prize money.

◇ Watch a skilled player on Twitch.tv as they move through all three stages of a tournament. Gauge their hand ranges at each stage and see how they match up to your own. Maybe the player you observe doesn't adhere to Daniel's advice. Can you work out why this might be?

◇ In your notepad, review your opening ranges for the early stage, paying careful attention to Daniel's advice of playing conservatively. Include open ranges from each position as well as which hands you will continue with if there is a three-bet. This is a great topic to discuss with other students in The Hub.

◇ Review hands where you had a big stack in the middle stage and clashed with another big stack, risking your tournament life. Mistakes in hands such as these are serious and are enough to make a large dent in your long-term profits. If any of these hands knocked you out of the tournament in question, post the details for discussion on The Hub.

# TOURNAMENT STRATEGY: ON THE BUBBLE

> "
> You don't want to be the person with a big stack who ends up on the bubble because you made a really goofy play and you let your ego take over.
> "

# TOURNAMENT STRATEGY: ON THE BUBBLE

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### SUBCHAPTERS

- UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF ICM
- LEVERAGE BIG STACKS
- PLAYING SHORT-STACKED
- PLAYING WITH A MIDDLE STACK
- AVOID ICM SUICIDE

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### CHAPTER REVIEW

THE BUBBLE STAGE is one of the most exciting parts of a tournament. When most of the remaining players will get a prize, those with short stacks feel maximum pressure to stay alive long enough to get in the money. Once this bubble finally bursts, you will see a huge flurry of action unlike any other period in the tournament, as everybody will now at least get paid back their entry fee.

Simply put, ICM tells you the profitability of a decision in money value rather than in chip value. Its purpose is to distinguish the difference in value of a chip as the tournament progresses, and this function is most important as the money bubble approaches. ICM is critical to your success at this stage of an event if your goal is maximum long-term profit. It is also important when you're at the final table and large jumps in prize money are significantly affecting your decisions. If your goal is only to win the tournament, then you take maximum value at every opportunity—but this is not the most profitable path.

You must learn to understand when you are in an advantageous or weak position, and adjust your play accordingly. If you're extremely short-stacked then conservative play is a must.

If you have a big stack, however, you're in a great position to leverage this against your opponents, knowing that they can't fight back without making critical mathematical errors. During this period, it is important not to tangle unnecessarily with other big stacks, as this can lead to catastrophe in tournament poker.

At this stage, short stacks are only going to go all in against big stacks when they have very strong hands—so, beware of making loose calls unnecessarily.

How short you are in relation to other stacks dictates the ideal strategy around the bubble. For example, if you have seven big blinds under the gun and hold $A$ $Q$, this is a clear shove at a table where the other players have 15–20 big blinds. You must attack here to try and get back in the game. If, however, you see three other players with three or less big blinds at your table, then the same shove becomes a huge mistake because of how much ICM pressure there is on the shortest stacks.

You can take this attitude to extremes where, for example, you might fold pocket aces to ensure you win a prize. This "nitty" attitude will hurt your pocket just as much as overly loose play.

If you have a middle stack at the bubble stage you will usually have to play extremely tight. You don't want to clash with big stacks, but you are safe enough that you don't want to risk the chips you already have. It's also a factor that you could soon have a short stack yourself if you don't accumulate some chips. Middle stacks are difficult to play but, as with short stacks, it is important not to take your adjustments to extremes.

You also need to make sure you're not committing ICM suicide. Daniel has seen players fold pocket aces in a bubble situation just to guarantee that they cash in. While the "tight is right" maxim is certainly true, it's important not to take it too far. The same applies with shoving too liberally. Remember: ICM is a factor you use to adjust your decisions around the bubble and final table. It does not mean you stop looking for value when you have a good hand.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Choose a tournament player on Twitch.tv who plays many tables at once and try to get a feel for how they handle bubble situations. In a single evening you should be able to witness many hands of this theme, and if you are surprised at any of the situations then don't miss the opportunity to discuss this with your fellow students. You can also try to ask the player questions in the Twitch chat box while they play.

◇ Download the ICM training program. Practice some situations to become familiar with the concept and take note of the most serious errors in your game. Repetition of this kind of training will turn you into an ICM master given enough time. To begin with, analyze the most extreme short-stack situations on the bubble and build from there.

◇ For an in-depth look at how one player skillfully leveraged a big stack on the bubble, take a look at this hand review from the 2016 PokerStars Caribbean Adventure.

# TOURNAMENT STRATEGY: LATE STAGES AND FINAL TABLE

> "
> Now we're past the bubble point: everybody's in the money and you're going to see the entire dynamic shift. What you saw before—all this pressure that was available to put on short stacks—is gone….What's going to happen is these short stacks are going to open up their game.
> "

# Tournament Strategy: Late Stages and Final Table

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## SUBCHAPTERS

- IN THE MONEY

- LATE STAGES: TAKE RISKS TO BUILD YOUR STACK FOR THE FINAL TABLE

- LATE STAGES: TAKE ADVANTAGE OF BEING THE FIRST TO ACT BEFORE THE FLOP

- THE FINAL TABLE: ACCOUNT FOR PAY JUMPS

- THE FINAL TABLE: TIMED AGGRESSION

## TERMS

**OPEN THE POT (v.):** To make the first voluntary bet preflop—either a call or raise.

**PAY JUMP (n.):** The difference between the prize amount for the next player out and that for one place higher.

**SHOVE OVER THE TOP (v.):** To shove all in over the top of another bet or raise.

**STEAL SITUATION (n.):** When you are in late position and no other player has entered the pot.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

THE DYNAMICS OF THE TOURNAMENT will shift once all the remaining players are in the money. During the bubble stage, the big stacks are able to apply pressure because they can threaten to knock out the medium-sized stacks that are almost guaranteed to cash in if they play conservatively. Once the bubble stage finishes, the short and medium stacks that survived will change their approach and play more aggressively with the intention of fighting to get back into contention for the win. You must adjust your strategy to take into account this new dynamic.

When the final table stage approaches, you must be prepared to take more risks to build the biggest stack possible. When the bubble stage ends, the jumps in pay are negligible, which is why the dynamics shift so noticeably; but at the final table, the jumps become significant. At this stage, a big stack is a powerful weapon to be feared by your opponents. Winning a poker tournament will require you to risk coin flip situations.

During the short-stacked late stages of a tournament, it is sometimes an advantage to have the opportunity to make the first voluntary bet before the flop when you are in late position. This is because you can profitably open shove all in with a wider range of hands than you can call or shove over the top of an open raise with. When you are short stacked, winning the blinds will increase your stack by a significant percentage, and is therefore crucial to building your stack back up. Take full advantage of these spots rather than playing cautiously, because they don't come around too often, and they are key to fighting your way back into contention. Allowing your stack to dwindle by playing conservatively is a poor strategy.

Once you reach the final table, however, you must also factor in how ranges change with ICM at play and the extreme pay jumps. ICM increases in significance as the pay jumps grow larger. The more ICM becomes a factor in your decision, the more conservatively you must play.
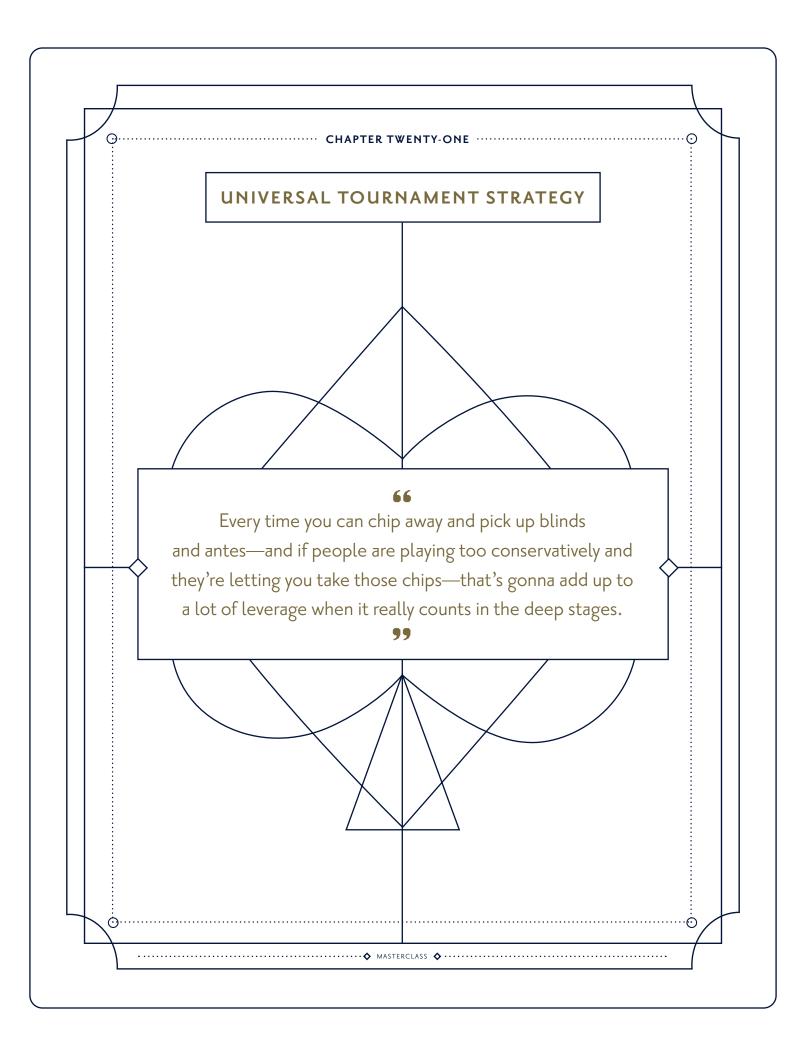
Big stacks have the opportunity to apply pressure on medium stacks while there are still short stacks almost out of chips. If you are a big stack and face aggression from a medium stack you must factor in the knowledge that their range will be stronger than usual. If you are a short stack then you have no choice but to play aggressively if you want to win the tournament. When you shove all in, your opponents need a stronger range to call than what you can profitably shove with. This concept rewards aggression and is much more successful than calling off your remaining chips. When your opponents fold to your shove, you will increase your stack by a considerable percentage, giving you a better chance of getting back into contention.

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## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Use an ICM trainer to master how the concept affects your strategy in the late stage of a tournament. Tournament players must have a deep understanding of the ICM concept, otherwise regularly challenging for the top places in an event will not be realistic.

# UNIVERSAL TOURNAMENT STRATEGY

> " Every time you can chip away and pick up blinds
> and antes—and if people are playing too conservatively and
> they're letting you take those chips—that's gonna add up to
> a lot of leverage when it really counts in the deep stages. "

# UNIVERSAL TOURNAMENT STRATEGY

◇

## TERMS

**COIN FLIP (N.):** When two hands are all in together preflop with similar equity. For example, a pocket pair against two overcards.

**FOLD EQUITY (N.):** The equity you gain when your opponent folds. The more frequently your opponent folds, the more fold equity you have in proportion to the pot size.

**NITTY (ADJ.):** A conservative, tight style of play.

**PUSH CHART FORMULA (N.):**

## CHAPTER REVIEW

POKER TOURNAMENTS are the most exciting form of poker because things are always in flux. The situation at your table will change frequently because of different size chip stacks and new players constantly coming and going.

Tournament variance is unavoidable. Often you will find yourself in a coin flip situation, such as Q Q all in against A K preflop, where both players made the correct decision and the result depends solely on luck. Daniel believes that tournament players need to have mental resilience to perform to their potential. Make the best decisions you can, but try to keep frustration at bay by remembering that some things are out of your control.

Whenever you are moved to a new table, it is crucial that you reassess your situation immediately. You need to map the table and figure out where the dangers are in terms of the stack size and skill level of your opponents. For example, if you go from a table where you've been the bully because you have the biggest stack to one where you're sitting next to the tournament's chip leader, you need to

adjust to be more cautious, so that you don't go broke. You must also look for the short stacks and assess what kind of player they are. The key is to constantly reassess, because dynamics will constantly change.

Avoid letting the average stack size influence your strategy. Thing can change so fast in a tournament that the average stack size isn't a good measure of your standing, or that of your opponents, at any given time. Daniel advises you to only change your strategy once you go below 20 big blinds. You will need to tighten up and see less flops. The key to playing a stack of this size is to go all in over an open raise. If your opponent folds, you will increase your stack size by around five big blinds. As your stack shrinks, the hands you need to go all in with get weaker as the pressure on you increases. Daniel warns against allowing your stack to get so small that you no longer have any fold equity.

Fold equity is the value you can expect to gain when an opponent folds to your bet. You lose fold equity when the starting pot represents a big percentage of your shove. In

this situation, it is unlikely that your opponent will ever fold, as the risk of calling your all-in shove is relatively low but the rewards are very high. Be mindful of how far you can go until you approach this point, because winning the blinds and antes preflop is how you survive in a tournament.

Antes in a tournament drive the action by putting more chips in the pot at the start of the hand. You cannot play as conservatively as in a cash game because the antes will eat your stack.
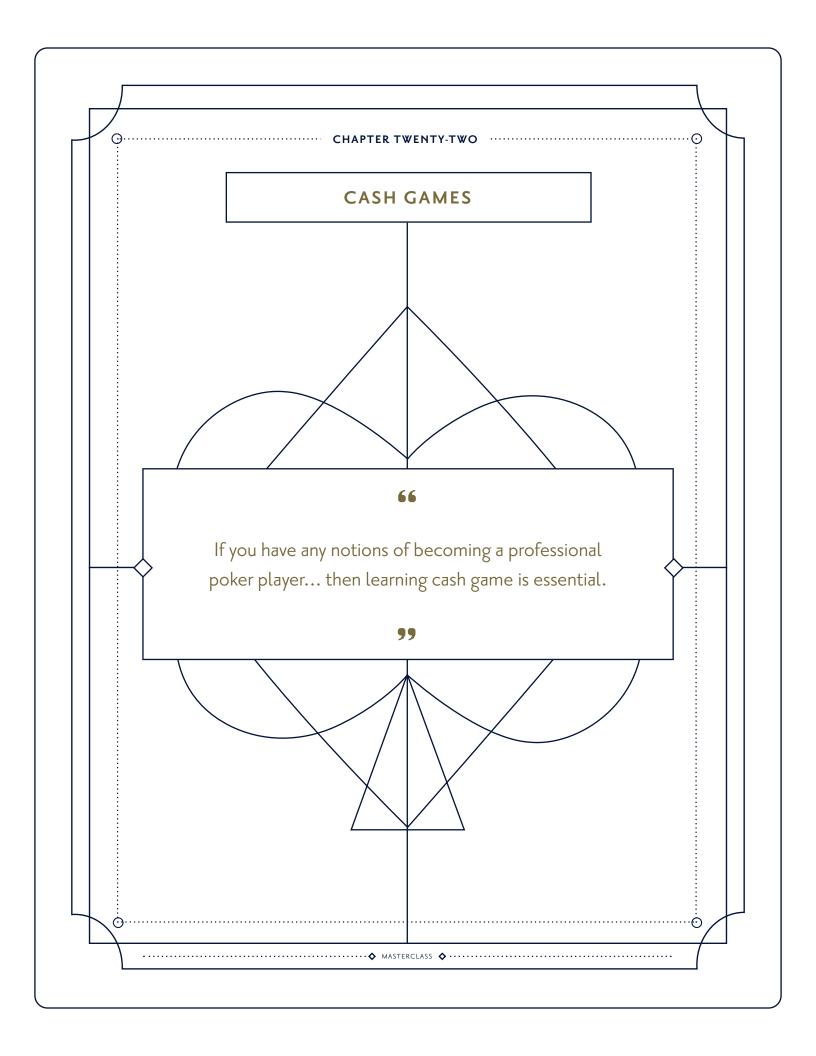
With antes in the starting pot, there are more chips to potentially win uncontested. At this stage in a tournament, you will often increase your stack by as much as 20 percent, which is a better way to add to your stack than always running coin flip situations. Keeping your stack as big as possible will pay dividends during the important late stages. You don't want to rely on repeated all-in situations to reach the latest stage of a tournament, but you still need to understand the math behind this. The tournament structure will affect how prepared you should be to risk all of your chips.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Familiarize yourself with all of the stages of a multi-table tournament in these guides: "How to Survive and Win a Huge Poker Tournament, Part 1" and "How to Survive and Win a Huge Poker Tournament, Part 2." Here you will learn more about how all the stages fit together in a tournament and how to adjust your strategy as you move from one stage to another.

◇ Daniel recommends a change of strategy when your stack reaches 20 big blinds. In your notebook, write down which hole cards you will shove all in when there is a single raiser and you are next to act with a 20 big blind stack. Use the concept of fold equity to work out when you need to tighten or widen your range. For example, if the open raiser is under the gun then his opening range will contain many strong hands that are less likely to fold. Conversely, if the open raiser is in the small blind— opening a wide range of hands—then you can shove a wide range yourself in the big blind. In this situation, if your opponent knows you are shoving a wide range, they might adjust their calling range to counter your strategy. Then you must adjust your default strategy during play depending on any reads on your opponent.

◇ Watch a skilled player on Twitch.tv to get a feel for how loosely they shove once their stack is smaller than 20 big blinds. Try to spot when they make an adjustment and play tighter or looser against certain opponents. Listen for an indication from the player about why their play deviated from their default strategy. This will often be directly related to how loose or tight the opponent is, but metagame dynamics will also play an important role. It is crucial that you develop your instincts in terms of how much you need to adjust in each situation. Overadjusting can be worse than not adjusting at all.

# CASH GAMES

"

If you have any notions of becoming a professional poker player... then learning cash game is essential.

"

# CASH GAMES

## SUBCHAPTERS

- ALWAYS GO FOR VALUE

- DON'T LIMP

- MODIFY STACK SIZE BASED ON STRATEGY AND CIRCUMSTANCES

- MAINTAIN A DEEP STACK TO MAXIMIZE YOUR EARN

- BE PREPARED TO CAPITALIZE ON RECKLESS PLAYERS

- AVOID SPEWY BEHAVIOR

- HAND STRENGTH SHOULD INCREASE AS YOU GET CLOSER TO THE RIVER

- THE DEEPER THE STACK, THE MORE IMPORTANT POSITION BECOMES

## TERMS

**CHECK-RAISE (V.):** To check postflop and then raise a bet from another player.

**DEEP-STACK CASH GAME (N.):** A cash game with stacks deeper than around 200 big blinds. (Note that the threshold for this term can differ. Online games almost always start with 100 big blind stacks, but can get deep. Live games tend to start deep because of the inconvenience of waiting for more chips to top up.)

**EDGE (N.):** When you have more equity than your opponent.

**HEADS-UP POT (N.):** A pot with two players.

**IN POSITION (ADJ.):** When you act after your opponent.

**LEAK (N.):** A habit that loses you money.

**MULTI-WAY POT (N.):** A pot with three or more players.

**NUTTED HAND (N.):** A hand that almost always rates to be the best. You can also describe a player holding such a hand as "nutted."

**OUT OF POSITION (ADJ.):** When you act before your opponent.

**OVERBET (N.):** A bet exceeding the size of the pot.

**SMALL BALL (ADJ.):** A style of poker that minimizes risk by consciously keeping the pot small unless the player has a strong hand.

**THE INITIATIVE (N.):** The player who made the last bet or raise is said to have the initiative.

**THE NUTS (N.):** The absolute best hand possible.

**TILT (N. AND V.):** A poor mindset that leads a player to make costly mistakes.

**VALUE BET (N.):** A bet where you expect to have more equity than your opponent.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

LEARNING CASH GAME STRATEGY is essential if you want to be a professional poker player. Tournament poker has extreme variance even when you are playing well, but cash games can provide a steady income.

Deep-stack cash games are more intricate than tournaments and require you to make more difficult decisions because more chips are under threat. Often in a tournament you will only have to make a decision preflop and on the flop because the stacks are so short. In a cash game, you have to consider your strategy all the way to the river with a deep stack at risk.

Don't assume, however, that because cash games are all about value they're simpler. The complexity of cash games is in the value game. Choosing your bet sizes is a difficult process when you're deep-stacked, but it is critical to extract maximum value from your opponents. In a tournament, factors such as ICM and the bubble relieve you of this pressure to always go for value and push your edges.

Cash games can be dangerous for players prone to tilt. Some players have the tendency to let their stacks dwindle to the point that the monetary value is so small that they make a bad decision to either pull it back or bust. Maintaining a healthy stack size can prevent this leak.

If you're the best player at the table, Daniel advises that you keep your stack close to the maximize buy-in to maximise your potential earnings. That way, you can win as many chips as possible when opportunities arise.

Daniel advises against open limping preflop. Many amateurs do this because they like to see as many flops as possible. Skilled players only raise preflop because there is a benefit to being the aggressor and taking the initiative, which can allow you to win pots postflop that you wouldn't win if you had limped in. The person who made the last bet or raise is said to have the initiative. Usually, the other players still in the hand will then check to this player on the next street, waiting to see what their action will be. In this pattern of play, you will often be able to take down the pot with a continuation bet.

It is important to capitalize on reckless players in a cash game. You should try to be aware of the mental state of all the players at your table as this affects the metagame on a much higher level than it does in tournaments. If you think a player is getting out of line, you have many more options to exploit them.
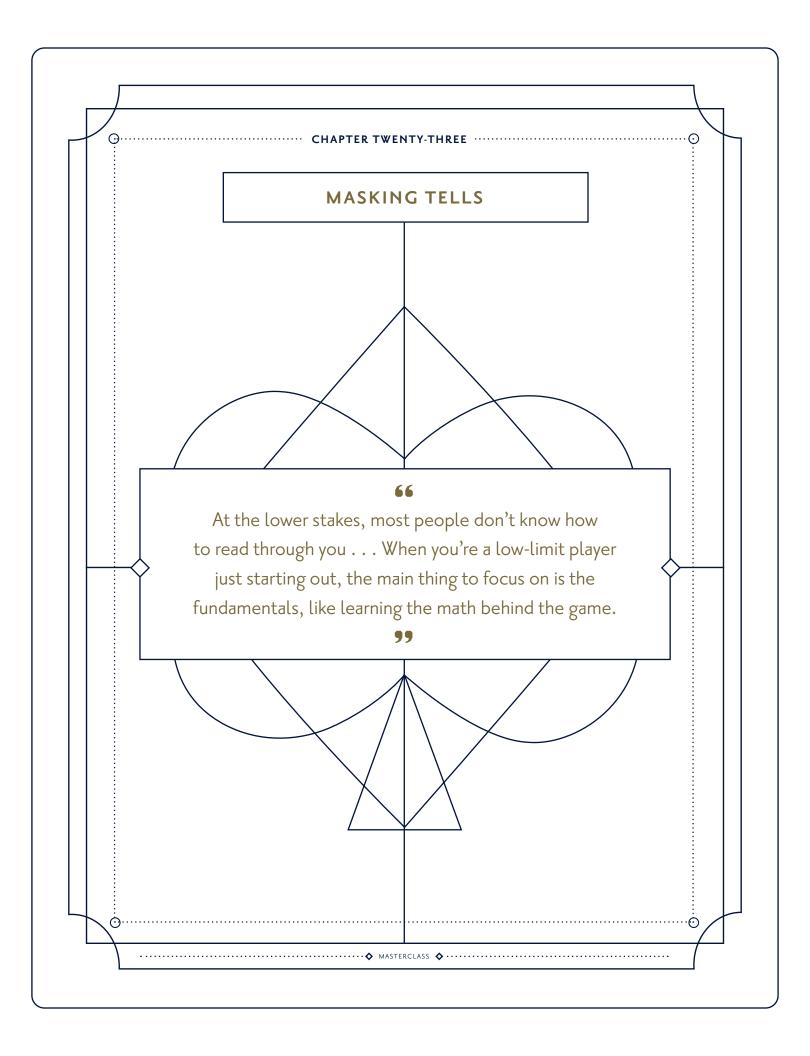
If you feel that you're in an unfavorable cash game situation, one way to protect yourself is to buy in for the minimum. While this is still deeper stacked play than in a tournament, it will prevent you from being put in more difficult spots against skilled opponents with deep stacks. If you're deep stacked, your average hand strength should increase as the hand progresses to the river. Daniel's famous small ball strategy was successful because of this principle. He would bluff at many small pots, but when the decisions were most important, such as on the river in a big pot, he would always have a strong hand.

In deep-stack games, position becomes more important. Being out of position is always a disadvantage if you are not short-stacked because your opponent gets to see what decision you make before they have to make their own. This extra information, in a game of incomplete information, gives your opponent a big advantage. When you have a deep stack, this the advantage amplified, so you should play more cautiously.

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## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Cash game play is all about getting value. During your playing sessions, every time you make a bet, take extra time to assess if you expect your hand to be the best more than half of the time. Record your assessments in your notebook (or smartphone) while you're playing and then—away from the table—check the accuracy of your assessments by using the Equilab app.

◇ Playing too loose out of position is a leak that costs beginners a lot of money. New players tend to underestimate how tight you must play from the blinds, particularly the small blind. Even with the discount preflop, the disadvantage of being out of position postflop is too great to overcome for weak hands. Watch a cash game session on Twitch.tv and see how tight even good players are in the blinds. One experiment you can do is to switch to a three-bet or fold strategy in the small blind. Calling in the small blind too liberally can be very costly.

# MASKING TELLS

> "
>
> At the lower stakes, most people don't know how to read through you . . . When you're a low-limit player just starting out, the main thing to focus on is the fundamentals, like learning the math behind the game.
>
> "

# MASKING TELLS

## CHAPTER REVIEW

READING BODY LANGUAGE AT THE POKER TABLE is one of Daniel's fortes. First, he advises you to wait until it's your turn to play to look at your cards. You can give a lot away in the time between when you look at your cards and when you play, so you want to minimize your opponents' opportunity to read you. You could use body language as a weapon of disinformation, but Daniel doesn't recommend this tactic to beginner players.

How you look at your cards is also important. If you've waited until your turn, now the entire table is looking at you, so it is important to be consistent in your physical action. Daniel illustrates how a quick look at your cards and visible excitement can suggest that you have a strong hand; whereas a longer look and more controlled expression is harder to read.

Once you look at your cards, you must protect them in order to prevent the dealer from mucking your cards in the middle of the hand—for example, you can use chips from your stack as a paperweight. Make sure to always protect your cards in the same way, regardless of the strength of your hand. Stacking a bunch of chips on top of your cards might signal that you're protecting a big hand.

The distance at which you keep your cards from the edge of the table can also reveal information to your opponents. If you leave your cards far away from you, it could signal weakness. If you keep them close, it could signal strength.

Daniel's general rule of thumb is that the more you do, the more you give away. This includes what you do with your phone, eating or drinking, and physical movements. To be successful, you need to minimize your movements and create a baseline of near-robotic behavior that gives away very little information to your opponents.
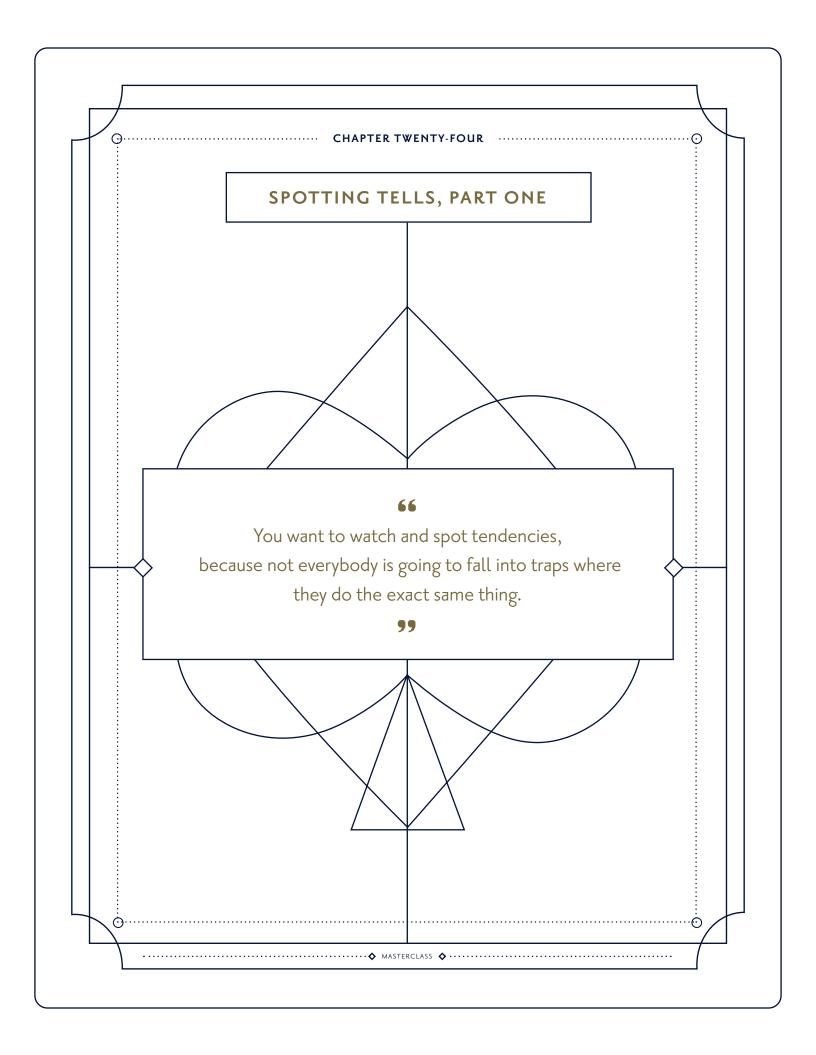
But rest assured—you don't have to have a good poker face to play poker. Fundamentals and math will help you win at lower limits, and by the time you reach higher stakes you'll have the experience you need to mask your physical tells.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Seek out footage from live tournaments to see how players conduct themselves when making physical actions. Replays of classic World Series of Poker events are perfect for this, as they contain a wide variety of player types from inexperienced amateurs to the elite level professionals such as Daniel. Can you spot differences in how players of different skill levels mask their tells?

◇ One way to practice the physical actions is to place a mirror in front of a table and to observe yourself. If you have a practice partner available, you can check each other until you have mastered all the actions. If you really want to get a lot of opinions on how well you mask your tells, you could video yourself and post the clip in The Hub to invite comment.

# SPOTTING TELLS, PART ONE

> **"**
> You want to watch and spot tendencies,
> because not everybody is going to fall into traps where
> they do the exact same thing.
> **"**

# SPOTTING TELLS, PART ONE

♣

## CHAPTER REVIEW

DANIEL'S NUMBER ONE RULE FOR SPOTTING TELLS is to look for deviations from the norm. For example, if a player's body language changes from totally disinterested to intense attention, it could signal that they're nervous. Players will often try too hard to appear strong or intimidating when in fact they have a weak hand, and this overt shift should be your clue. Shifts in a player's pattern of fidgeting can also signal a weak hand. For example, if your opponent normally plays with his or her chips in a certain way and then stops or speeds up the motion, it could indicate that they're uncomfortable.

Daniel says tells that involve the eyes have made him more money than any other over the years, because your eyes will naturally reveal how much you like what you see. When you see a player immediately glance at their chips when the flop comes down, it's usually because they are ready to put some chips into the middle. Conversely, if the player just stares at the flop cards, it's unlikely that they like what they see. This is your green light to steal the pot.

The timing of a player's physical movements can give you critical information that will allow you to either get away from a hand cheaply or to steal a pot you otherwise expect to lose. Daniel illustrates with an example from his days of playing limit hold'em, which is a fast-paced game with the bets coming thick and fast: if your opponent extends his or her arm before you have made your own action, it's a sure sign they are getting ready to commit some chips.

At a high level, a player's appearance of comfort or discomfort is one of the most reliable tells. Players reveal comfort or discomfort in the way they cross their arms or blow smoke. A defensive cross of the arms or blowing smoke through tight lips can indicate fear or nervousness. This rule can be applied to any kind of external behavior.
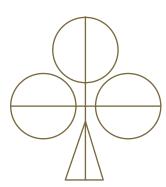
Remember: Data accumulation is essential to a reliable read. A single instance of a physical tell will rarely give you enough information to act upon.
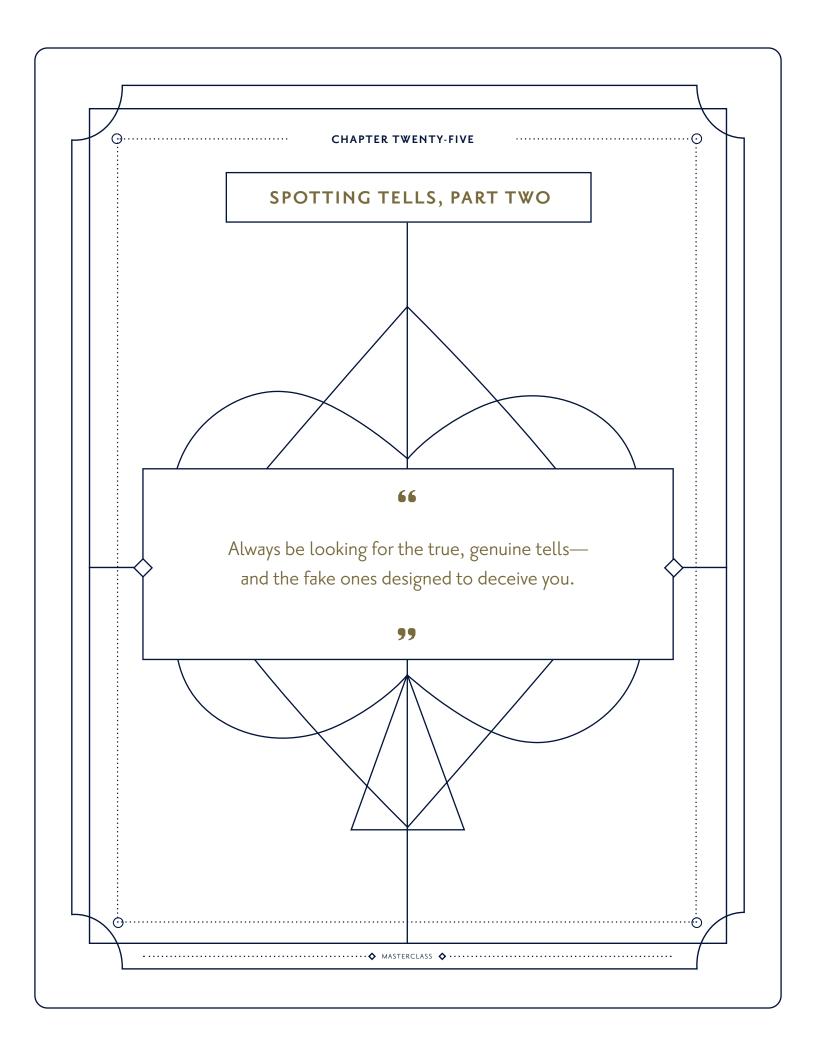
## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Read *Caro's Book of Poker Tells* by Mike Caro. Often listed as one of the top ten greatest books ever written on poker, Caro's work painstakingly details how to read your opponents over the felt.

◇ Another type of tell often talked about in online play is a timing tell. It is common for some players to give crucial information in this way. For example, calling a c-bet instantly. Usually, if a player has a strong or worthless hand, they will at least pause to consider a raise. The "insta-call," as it is known, is thought to indicate a draw or weak pair. Try to observe this kind of tell in your own play online or by watching others on Twitch.

◇ Use footage of live poker with the sound turned off to practice reading visual clues. Try to predict whether a player is strong or weak based on your observations of their body language. Clips that include amateur players will be best for this exercise, as the seasoned professionals rarely make mistakes that you will be able to pick up on.

# SPOTTING TELLS, PART TWO

> "
> Always be looking for the true, genuine tells—
> and the fake ones designed to deceive you.
> "

# SPOTTING TELLS, PART TWO

◇

## SUBCHAPTERS

• BE WARY OF "THE SPEECH"

• BETTING MOTION

• BREATHING

• ORAL FIXATIONS

• REVERSE TELLS

## TERMS

**HERO CALL (N.):** When a player has a relatively weak hand but suspects that their opponent is bluffing so they decide to call that opponent's bet on the final round of betting.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

❝ THE SPEECH" IS WHEN a player tries to downplay the strength of their hand before an all-in shove. In Daniel's experience, this typically means that they are trying to disguise a strong hand—especially when it's coming from an amateur.

A player's betting motion can give a clue as to their hand strength. For example, players with a weaker hand may try to communicate strength with an aggressive betting motion because they want to intimidate you into folding. Conversely, a player with a stronger hand may bet in a more inviting way because they know they have you beat and want you to call. In addition, body language that is more timid, such as betting away from an opponent in a heads-up pot, can indicate weakness. As with all physical tells, pay attention to betting motions that deviate from the norm, making sure to correlate the strength of any hands shown with that action.

A player's breathing patterns can also give away valuable information. Heavy breathing often indicates stress and nervousness, which shows a lack of confidence in their hand. Changes in any of a player's mannerisms—especially ones that involve a player's mouth—can be revealing. Daniel recounts a story from the World Series of Poker in which he noticed that one of his opponents always stopped chewing his gum when he was bluffing. By paying attention and correlating what this meant, Daniel was able to make a hero call later in the tournament in a large pot.

Some players, however, will try to deceive you by deliberately giving off a tell that is false. This technique is called a "reverse tell," and you too can use it to exploit your opponents. Daniel once lost a big pot because his opponent noticed that he blinked a lot when he was bluffing. However, Daniel recognized this and was able to reverse it to trick that same opponent into thinking that he was bluffing when he really had the nuts.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Put your learnings from *Caro's Book of Poker Tells* by Mike Caro into practice. Watch footage of live poker and try to match your reads with the result of the hand. Look for games involving amateur players, because they make more mistakes of this nature.

◇ If you play live with friends, consult with them regularly to exchange reads on each other and your opponents. Are you giving away too much information? Consider inviting feedback about your perceived tells from other players in The Hub.

# SPOTTING TELLS: HAND REVIEWS

> "
>
> When you're using body language tells, you want to make sure that you accumulate some data before making a big decision with it. Now that I've got this hand under my belt, I know in the future if I see that same sort of reaction from Demjan, it's likely to be a sign of strength.
>
> "

# SPOTTING TELLS: HAND REVIEWS

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SUBCHAPTERS
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## Detecting a Reverse Tell vs. Nick Schulman

### SUBCHAPTER TERMS

**GUTSHOT DRAW (N.):** When you have four out of the five cards needed for a particular draw, but are missing one.

**STREET (N.):** A segment of play. Any card that is dealt or any betting round.

### THE HAND:

Daniel makes an unusual play by open limping A♦ 2♠ from the button. Katchalov completes in the small blind with K♦ 9♦ and Nick Schulman checks with 6♦ 2♥ to see a free flop in the big blind.

The flop comes 4♥ 4♠ Q♥ and all three players check.

The turn is 5♥ and Katchalov checks. Schulman takes the opportunity to bluff and Daniel calls the half-pot bet with only ace-high. Katchalov folds.

The river is 8♦ and Schulman follows through with his bluff and bets around two-thirds of the pot. Daniel makes the hero call with only ace-high and wins the pot.

### DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:

This hand illustrates the importance of being able to raise your game and make unconventional decisions when facing the world's best players. This particular example focuses on a physical read.

Daniel decides to limp the button for deception purposes. If the flop contains an ace, it will be very difficult for his opponents to give him credit for having one. Also, a button limping range can be expected to have many speculative hands that connect with many wet boards. This will create ample bluffing opportunities.

After Katchalov checks, Daniel sees Schulman glance at his chips in an undisguised manner. Schulman is an accomplished player and is unlikely to make such a glaring error, making Daniel think this is an attempt to set up a bluff for the next street once he finally checks. When Daniel also checks to end the street, he caps his range somewhat.

Schulman bluffs the turn and Daniel makes the call with his gutshot straight draw, mainly because he assesses that ace-high is still the best hand here—especially given the read he picked up on Schulman on the flop. Daniel's perceived range here is weighted toward flush draws with only a few Qs and 4s.

On the river, Schulman's range still contains many 4s and flushes with some 7s and 6s, but Daniel thinks that he wouldn't usually bet any Qs, 8s, or 5s. This information combined with the flop check and read on the flop weights Schulman's range more toward bluffs than value hands.

## Identifying a Likely Sign of Strength vs. Sándor Demján

### SUBCHAPTER TERMS

**BLOCKING BET (N.):** A small bet designed to stop your opponent from making a large bet that is difficult to call.

**BRICK (N.):** A turn or river card that is expected to have no impact on the outcome of the hand.

**PEEL (V.):** To call a bet or raise so you can see one more card on the board.

### THE HAND:

Daniel opens **Q♥ 10♥** from MP+1 and Sándor Demján, an amateur, calls in the cutoff. Martin Jacobson, former World Series of Poker Main Event champion, also calls in the big blind.

The flop comes **10♦ J♥ Q♣** and Jacobson checks. Daniel c-bets a little more than half the pot. Demján calls and Jacobson folds.

The turn is **3♠**, completing the rainbow board and changing nothing. Daniel fires the second barrel, and Demján calls again.

The river is **2♣**—another brick. Daniel bets again, but this time less than half the pot. Demján then raises to almost three times the bet and Daniel quickly folds, assessing that his opponent is unlikely to be bluffing.

### DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:

Daniel makes a standard open raise with a quality hand and Demján calls in position. Daniel expects his range to mainly consist of suited high cards and suited connectors, with some pocket pairs and suited aces.

Daniel's elects to make a flop c-bet on what is a dangerous board because he can get value from straight draws and he also has the possibility of turning a flush draw. Once Demján calls his range becomes much tighter, although Daniel thinks he is likely to peel once with only ace-high.

The turn card changes nothing in the situation, meaning that if Daniel was ahead on the flop, then he is almost certainly still ahead and can continue to bet for value. Once Demján calls the turn c-bet he gives off a physical tell by overexaggerating that he wasn't sure if he should continue. Daniel is unsure how to read this tell, but that information can help with any decisions on the river.

The river card changes nothing too, so Daniel decides to make a blocking bet. This is a bet size smaller than what he feels committed to calling if he checks and then Demján bets. Once Daniel bets and Demján raises he can easily fold knowing his opponent almost certainly has the best hand.

Daniel is now able to correlate the physical tell exhibited on the turn for future hands.

# TABLE TALK

> "
>
> You'll find that if you sit at a table and you're cordial and you're friendly, you'll be able to [gather] so much more information from your opponents, just by being a nice person. And that's going to help your win rate in the long run as well, because you're gonna have more information to make better decisions when it's crunch time.
>
> "

# TABLE TALK

◇

## CHAPTER REVIEW

**D**ANIEL USES TABLE TALK to learn as much as he can about the people he's playing against. Any information you can get from your opponents can help to formulate a profile of how they play. Daniel explains how even a person's profession can give you clues about their character and how that might affect their play. For example, a lawyer who spends their days twisting facts is likely to make a more formidable opponent than a gentle Sunday School teacher. When meeting players for the first time, you can use table talk to quickly gather information that might help you during play. Be careful though, because your opponents will be assessing you too.

You can use table talk in the middle of a hand to try and elicit a reaction that might lead to a better read on a player. You can speak to your opponent directly or to somebody else at the table—with the intention of having your opponent hear it—in order to gauge their reaction. A sudden change of mood depending on what you say can be an accurate tell if your assessment is correct.
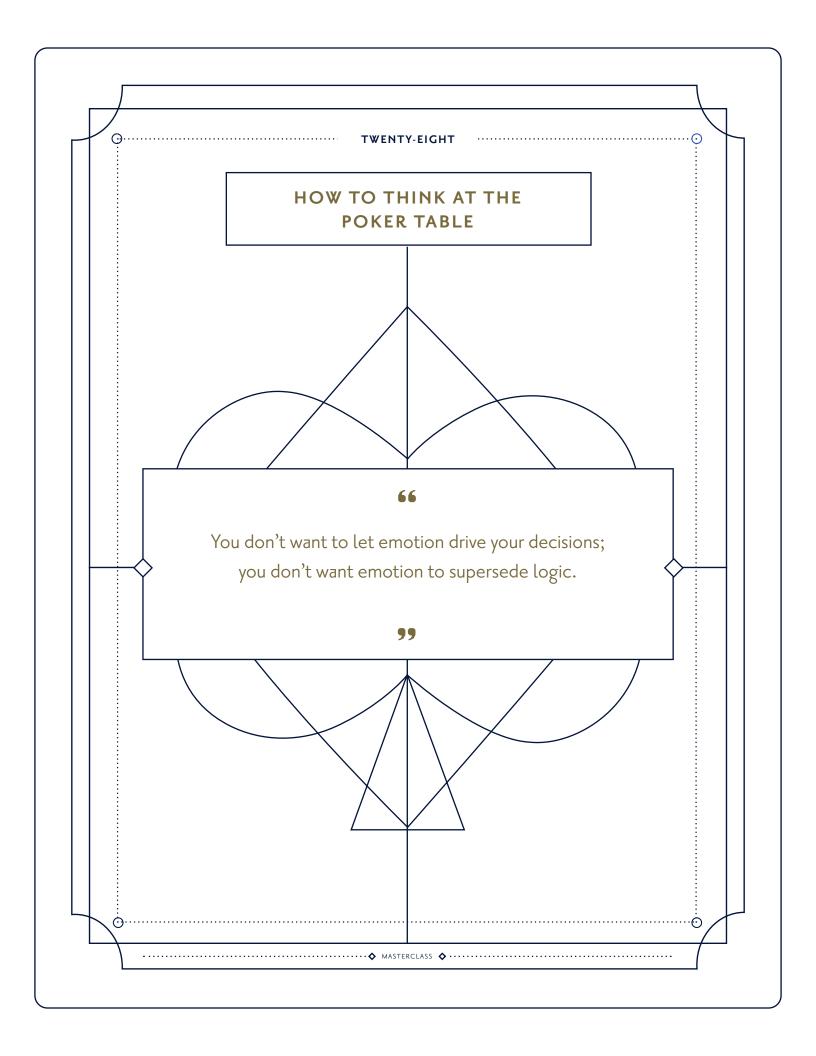
Table talk can be used other ways too. In addition to learning more about your opponent, you can use table talk to add another layer of believability to your bluffs if you've got a solid read on an opponent's hand.

Your opponents will also be trying to read you through table talk. If you don't feel comfortable engaging them in chat, Daniel recommends focusing your attention on a section of the table. It is important to be consistent though, as deviations from the norm can give away vital information.

Table talk isn't without danger. As a beginner you might give away more information than you get back. To get into the practice, you can start by chatting between hands until you feel more comfortable.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ In your notebook, list five key pieces of information you can learn about your opponent when meeting them for the first time that you believe will help you understand how they play poker. Script five questions that you can use to gain this information inconspicuously. Make assumptions about how each piece of information will translate into their poker game, and test your theories in a live game. You won't always be correct, but can you spot any patterns? Be careful about getting drawn into conversations that might make you give away information about yourself.

◇ Try to find situations where you know your opponent has a very narrow range. Follow Daniel's advice and tell them what their hand is before making a bluff. Do you find you that players are folding more often because of your speech tactics? For example, one suitable situation for using table talk to call out a narrow range is when facing a three-bet. Many players don't have a bluff range, and you might be able to judge if they have a premium hand. Another situation where ranges are always narrow is a river raise. These raises almost always indicate a nutted hand, but you might be able to use table talk to judge if they are bluffing.

# HOW TO THINK AT THE POKER TABLE

> " 
> You don't want to let emotion drive your decisions;
> you don't want emotion to supersede logic.
> "

# How to Think at the Poker Table

## SUBCHAPTERS

- MAINTAIN A CONSISTENT ORDER OF OPERATIONS

- DON'T LET EMOTION SUPERSEDE LOGIC

- THE GAMBLER'S FALLACY

- DON'T GAMBLE, STICK TO THE MATH

- DON'T THROW GOOD MONEY AFTER BAD

- LISTEN TO YOUR INSTINCTS

- BE OBJECTIVE IN YOUR SELF-ANALYSIS

- QUIZ: THINKING ABOUT THINKING

## CHAPTER REVIEW

**P**OKER IS A GAME THAT INVOLVES a lot of thinking, and the best way to perform to your potential is to do most of your work away from the table. You will best learn how to structure your thought processes and streamline your order of operations when studying poker theory in the lab, away from any time pressure. It is critical that you are fluent with juggling concepts such as hand strength, hand ranges, and pot odds, so that you don't miss clues with a lazy thought process.

You must also think about the right things during play to get the best results. Beginners will too often let emotion influence their decisions, which always leads to poor long-term results. Emotional decision-making is also a common trigger for tilt. One example of this behavior is when a player folds a junk hand only for it to make a monster on the flop. They then start to play that same hand in situations that they know they shouldn't. Emotion gets in the way of good logic, especially if you are results-oriented.

You must never let what happened in a previous hand affect any future hands. All too often beginners will try to predict patterns that don't exist and avoid logic altogether. For example, if you flip a coin and it lands on heads 10 times in a row, the odds of it being heads on the next flip are the same as on any flip. Previous action does not affect the future, and trying to implement this fallacy into your thought process will end in disaster. You should always stick to the math in every situation instead of following a hunch or outright gambling.

Don't compound your mistake when you recognize you made one. All poker players make mistakes and being able to adjust mid-hand will prevent a small mistake from becoming an expensive one. You should never feel committed to continuing a bad plan because of how much money you have already put into the pot. The money that is already in the pot should only be considered for pot odds.
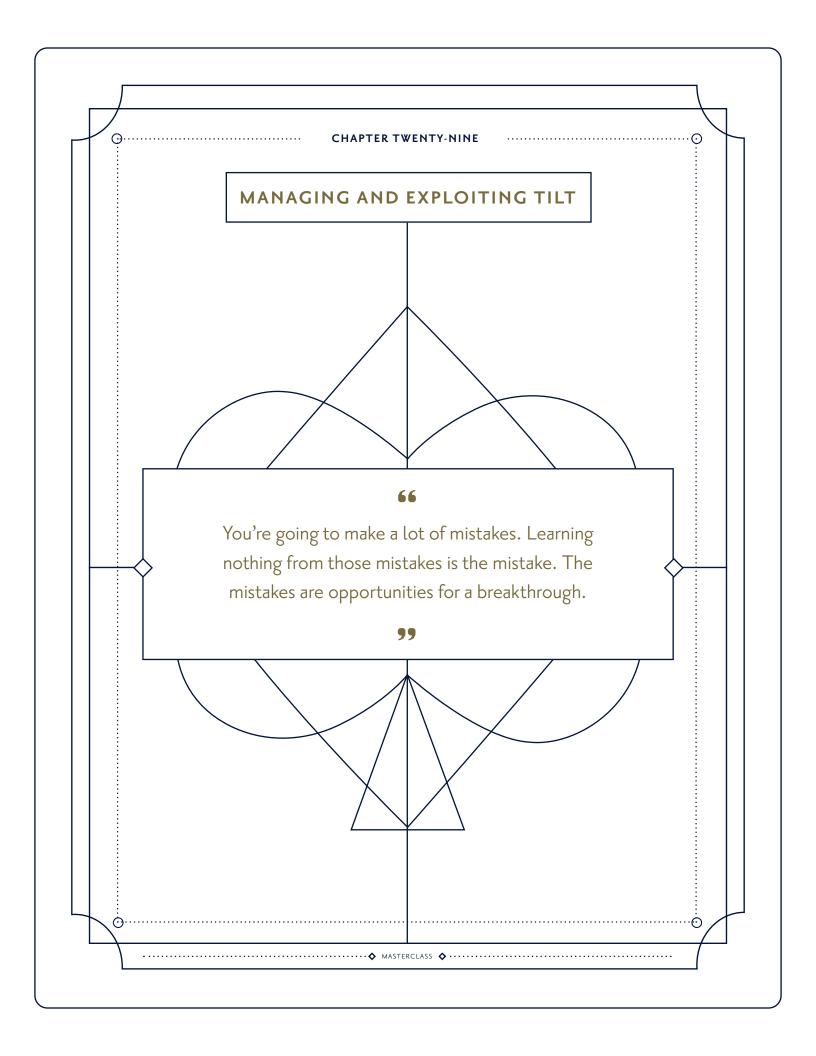
You should listen to your instincts when you have a close decision. Often you will perform the correct thought process and arrive at a unclear decision. When this happens, Daniel advocates listening to your instincts as they will frequently guide you in the right direction.

Makes notes during your playing sessions for later analysis—both technical and mental game—but always remain objective about what happened. Results in poker do not always correlate with the circumstances and it is easy to misjudge what really happened if you pay too much attention to the session results. For your self-analysis to be objective, it is vital that you are honest with yourself.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Every time you feel that emotion affected your decision at the table, note the hand for later analysis. Performing a full technical investigation of the hand will highlight situations where problems with your mental game are affecting how you think.

◇ Daniel advises that you include your instincts in your decision-making process in close situations. Note hands where you used your first instinct, and analyze how often you are right. If you tend to be wrong a lot in these situations, it may mean the decision wasn't as close as you originally thought. If this is the case, you should dedicate more time to studying your mental game.

# MANAGING AND EXPLOITING TILT

> " You're going to make a lot of mistakes. Learning nothing from those mistakes is the mistake. The mistakes are opportunities for a breakthrough. "

# MANAGING AND EXPLOITING TILT

## CHAPTER REVIEW

THREE AREAS MAKE UP THE SKILL SET of an elite poker player: fundamentals, math, and discipline. Daniel says that discipline is the most important because it will help you to overcome the inevitable bad runs.

Tilt is a poor mindset that leads a player to make costly mistakes—usually born out of frustration. Symptoms of tilt include playing hands that you shouldn't and bluffing too much. In a cash game you can quit and play another day, but in a tournament you are stuck and must make the best of the situation. In order to overcome tilt, it is crucial that you focus on the moment, rather than letting yourself become preoccupied with the past.

Daniel recommends a four-stage process to avoid tilt after a bad beat.

- Vent your frustration internally. This allows you to let go of that emotional reaction and release tension.

- Check your mental state and become present in the moment.

- Check your physical state. If there is still a feeling of tension, you can return to the first stage

- Determine how you wish to feel from that moment forward. This process allows you to move on from what happened.

Another way to avoid tilt is to analyze your mistakes and learn something from them. Each mistake is an opportunity to increase your skill level.

When you are already starting to tilt, remind yourself to focus on the fundamentals of the game. Tilt impairs your ability to think clearly, but if you still make good fundamental decisions, you can minimize the damage.

You can also attempt to tilt your opponents in order to impair their thought processes. Showing a bluff on the river in a big pot is one possible plan. Daniel doesn't recommend this if you're a beginner because you might give away too much information. But if you're an experienced player, you can try.

A change in a player's demeanor—accelerated breathing or drinking too much at the table, for example—can give you clues that they might be going on tilt before it becomes obvious.  They might also change their game—for example, they might play too many hands. It's important to keep an eye on your opponents so you can pick up on the subtle indicators that they may be in a tilted mental state.

Tilt will manifest in different ways in each individual. Understanding how each of your opponents is affected can give you important information to exploit them. For

example, if you observe an opponent bluffing more frequently, you must call them down more often.
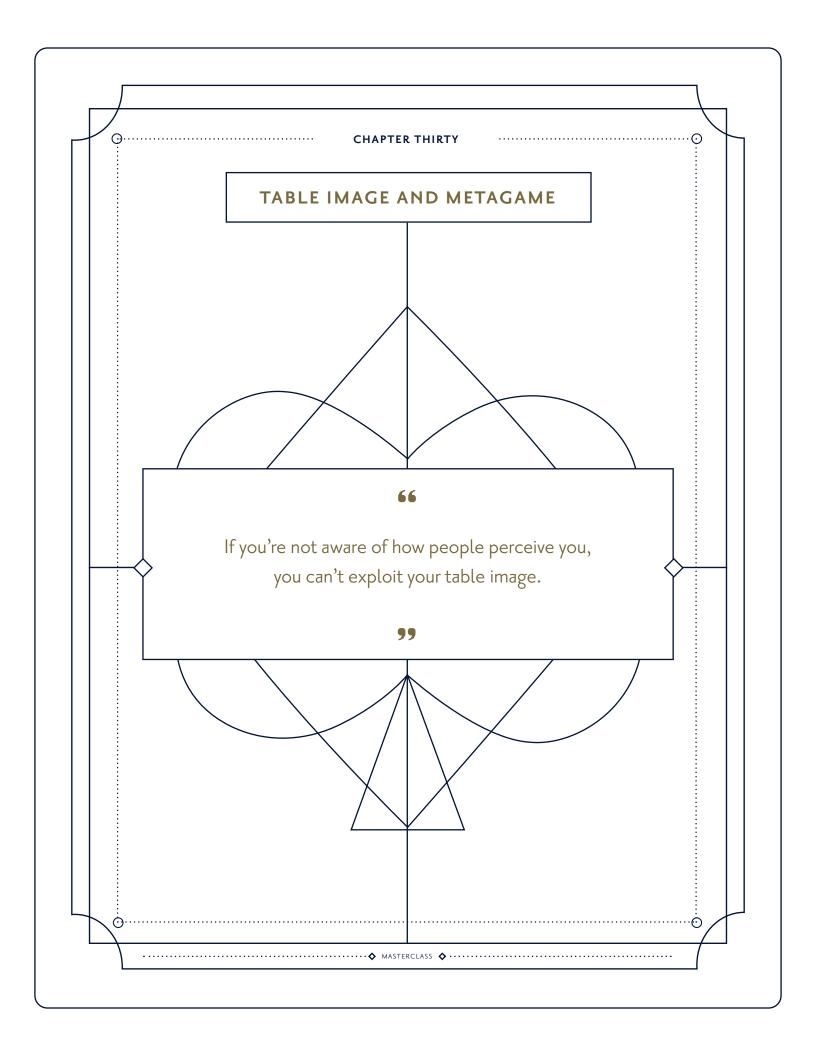
Knowing when your opponent is at their pain threshold can give you an opportunity to make extra profit or to avoid making a bluff that won't work. Every time your

opponent encounters a piece of bad luck, it increases their frustration level. This accumulates until they reach their pain threshold, when the character of their game will change considerably.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ No player is immune from tilt, and it can take years to break through the triggers that cause you to tilt. The first step to reducing tilt is to analyze your emotions during play to find out when you feel most frustrated. Use your notebook to keep a record of the circumstances or game events that affect your performance.

◇ When you've reached a level of self-awareness in which you can recognize that your emotions are about to affect your performance, use a process called "injecting logic" to prevent yourself from passing the pain threshold. For example, during a bad run you can remind yourself that variance is a normal part of poker. This simple process can relax your subconscious mind enough to prevent tilt. Fear, motivation, and confidence are factors which affect your mental game. Assess your own relationship with each of these to begin the process of reducing tilt in your game. For more about how to train for the mental game of poker, see Chapter 35: Off-Felt Training.

# TABLE IMAGE AND METAGAME

> "
>
> If you're not aware of how people perceive you,
> you can't exploit your table image.
>
> "

# TABLE IMAGE AND METAGAME

## SUBCHAPTERS

- BE AWARE OF HOW OTHERS PERCEIVE YOU
- TABLE IMAGE IS MORE THAN JUST YOUR APPEARANCE
- PERCEPTION OF TABLE IMAGE IS MADE IMMEDIATELY
- UNDERSTAND THAT YOU'RE NOT ALWAYS IN CONTROL OF YOUR TABLE IMAGE

- BE A CHAMELEON
- ENSURE THAT YOU CAN CAPITALIZE ON THE IMAGE YOU CULTIVATE
- MAKE SUBTLE ADJUSTMENTS
- KNOW WHAT LEVEL YOUR OPPONENTS ARE THINKING ON

- FOOL YOUR OPPONENTS WITH SUBOPTIMAL PLAYS
- CAPITALIZE ON THE SUSPICIONS OF YOUR OPPONENTS
- REACTIVE ADJUSTMENTS POINT TO WEAKER HANDS

## CHAPTER REVIEW

TABLE IMAGE REFERS TO your opponents' perception of you. It's a big factor in all forms of poker and it influences how your opponents play against you. But you have to be self-aware enough to know what image you're projecting and how that image will be perceived in order to exploit it. A number of factors play into table image, and it evolves as a game progresses. You can shape your table image by being careful about what information you give away. Hands you show down, or even the clothes you wear, can reveal valuable information to your opponents. When you first sit down at a table, you give away information with your demeanor and the size of your buy-in.

When playing against unfamiliar players, you have an advantage in that they don't know how you play. The downside is you don't know anything about them either. You might misread a player because of information everybody else has that you don't.

First impressions can be crucial. Your opponents might have misconceptions about the way you play because of how you played the early hands. Understand that the flow of hands is out of your control but still affects how people perceive you. If, for example, you are running terribly bad, then your opponents won't be as afraid of you. They might try to bluff you more and push you around. But you can spin this to your advantage by using your perceived image to bluff. Experienced players will also sometimes make a suboptimal play in order to manipulate their table image for a later exploit.

Creating a table image is a longer term endeavor in cash games than in tournaments, where your table can break at any time. You want to cultivate an unpredictable table image, by playing in a way that makes it hard for your opponents to pigeonhole you. To capitalize on table image you need to subvert the expectations of your opponents. For example, Daniel's image was that of a player who called too often, so he began making more folds. Remember to be subtle when making these adjustments to avoid alerting the other players. They will eventually catch on and make adjustments themselves. So you need to be prepared to make counter-adjustments.

Multilevel thinking is critical in a high-stakes game. Level one is thinking about your own hand. Level two is thinking about what your opponent has. Level three is thinking about what your opponent thinks you have. This pattern goes on indefinitely. Try to deduce what level your opponents are thinking on. (This is called "metagame.")

High-level play will not work against level one thinkers, as they don't understand what poker strategy is.

You must be aware when your opponents make metagame adjustments. For example, if you are repeatedly reraising a player preflop, they will start to adjust. When they have made this adjustment, their range will be significantly weaker than usual in that particular situation. You must be aware when they are ready to adjust.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ During your playing sessions, record any hands where you feel your opponent may be adjusting against you specifically. One of the most frequent adjustments players will make is to three-bet you more often if they assess you are folding too much. Another is to four-bet you more often if they think you are three-betting too much. Reverting to a balanced strategy is a good way to protect yourself if you think you are being exploited.

◇ Building a table image of an opponent is difficult for inexperienced players. To learn this skill, start by concentrating on a single player at your table. The player to your immediate right is an ideal choice as you will have position on them in nearly all of the hands, which gives you a permanent advantage over them and allows you to play more pots with them. Start by assessing how many hands they are open raising so you can accurately define what their range is. Follow up by assessing how often they fold to three-bets in each position. If they fold most of the time, you can widen your three-bet bluff range. Stop bluffing them if they never fold and widen your value range.

◇ Observe a player on Twitch.tv and concentrate on their playing style. See how this affects the way other players adjust against them. Do you think the average opponent adjusts quickly, or is it more of a slow process? Also pay careful attention to how big the adjustment is. Maybe you usually adjust more than this, or is it less?

# TABLE IMAGE AND METAGAME: HAND REVIEWS

> "
>
> The lesson here, really, is to understand that the metagame is super important and it's always changing. The metagame that existed before this hand has completely changed forever now because he's gonna know I'm capable of this bluff, so it's gonna make it less effective.
>
> "

# TABLE IMAGE AND METAGAME: HAND REVIEWS

◇

## Using Metagame to Steal a Pot vs. Alec Torelli

### SUBCHAPTER TERMS

**LEAD INTO (V.):** In a heads-up pot, to make the first bet on a postflop street. Implies that your bet is directed at an opponent.

**OUTS (N.):** Cards you need to complete your draw.

**SHOVE (V.):** To bet all of your remaining chips.

### THE HAND:

Daniel opens from early position with A♣ J♠. Alec Torelli calls with 5♠ 5♦, Dario Sammartino calls with 3♠ 3♦, Danny Parlafes calls with 8♦ 6♦ in the small blind, and Luca Pagano calls with J♥ 7♣ in the big blind.

The flop comes Q♦ 5♣ 2♣ and both blinds check to Daniel, who makes a c-bet of around half the pot. Torelli makes a small raise with his set. Everybody folds around to Daniel who makes the call.

The turn is J♣ giving Daniel second pair and the nut flush draw. Daniel unusually decides to lead into the aggressor out of position. Torelli only calls.

The river is A♦ and Daniel moves all in. Torelli folds.

### DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:

Daniel's c-bet in a five-way pot is an unorthodox play, but it was made specifically with the intention to do something that his opponents would never expect. This is a high-risk move that can allow sophisticated bluffs later in the hand.

Daniel was able to call the small flop raise because he holds A♣ which gives him additional options. Since he holds A♣, he also knows that his opponent cannot hold the nut flush. And if another club comes on the turn, he can represent it himself because betting into four players and calling a raise makes sense if he holds a flush.

Once J♣ comes on the turn, Daniel continues with his plan to represent the nut flush, knowing that he still has outs to actually make that hand. The fact that he now has a second pair is almost irrelevant compared to the plan in action.

After Torelli calls the turn lead, Daniel assesses that he is unlikely to have a flush, because he wouldn't often raise in a five-way pot with such a hand and he would probably have folded a pair of queens. This makes Torelli's likely hand a set of fives or twos.

Daniel now has to be confident that he can make Torelli fold such a strong hand in the face of extreme aggression, even when representing the nut flush. There are also three premium sets that beat Torelli's likely hand.

Daniel's river shove is a clear bluff attempt, rather than value betting with two pair. This entire move was constructed based on the metagame with this specific opponent. Now that the hands from this pot are known, the metagame will shift for any future action. Both players must now adjust their strategies the next time they play together.

## Incorporating Table Image Into a Four-Bet Range vs. Steven Silverman

**THE HAND:**

Daniel opens J♠ 9♦ from the cutoff with one of the biggest stacks remaining. Steven Silverman three-bets with A♠ A♥ on the button, and both of the blinds fold.

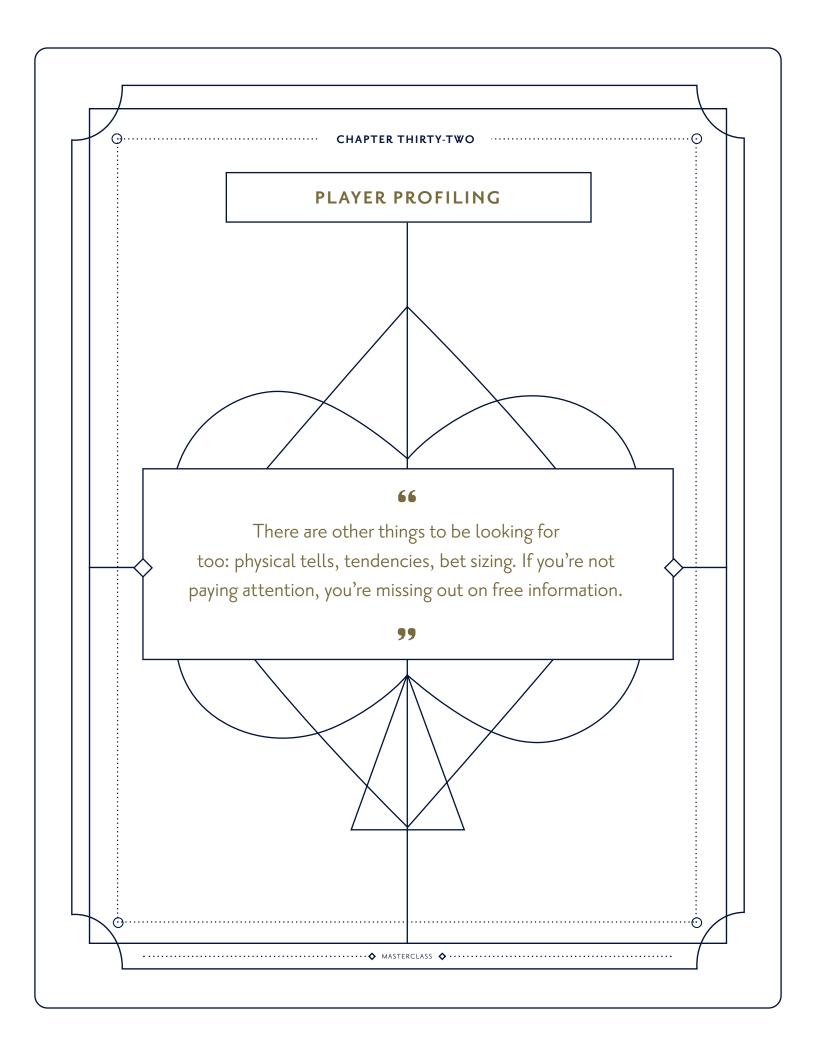Daniel four-bets and Silverman comes back over the top with a small five-bet.

Daniel folds his bluff.

**DANIEL'S ANALYSIS:**

Daniel makes a slightly wider-than-normal open from the cutoff due to his large stack size.

Once Silverman makes the three-bet, Daniel assesses that this is the right time to attempt a four-bet bluff as he has been extremely aggressive in this way for much of the session. Daniel is also known for only calling three-bets rather than employing an aggressive four-bet strategy. He hopes that this table image will help him to get the bluff through.

Even though the bluff was never going to work in this situation, it was still correct for Daniel to use his table image to apply some aggression against his opponent.

# PLAYER PROFILING

> **"**
>
> There are other things to be looking for
> too: physical tells, tendencies, bet sizing. If you're not
> paying attention, you're missing out on free information.
>
> **"**

# PLADYER PROFILING

## SUBCHAPTERS

- PAY ATTENTION
- PAY ATTENTION EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT IN THE HAND
- CREATE A ROAD MAP OF THE PLAYERS YOU'RE UP AGAINST
- THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LAGS AND MANIACS

- THERE ARE ENDLESS CATEGORIES
- PLAYER TYPES CHANGE BASED ON THE STAKES
- PLAYER TENDENCIES CHANGE BASED ON THEIR OPPONENTS
- SPOTTING BEGINNERS

- TAKE NOTE WHEN PASSIVE PLAYERS SHOW STRENGTH
- ALLOW AGGRESSIVE PLAYERS TO TRAP THEMSELVES

## TERMS

**LAG (N.):** Loose aggressive player. They play a wide range of hands in an effective manner.

**MANIAC (N.):** A player who plays too many hands in an overly aggressive fashion, mostly without a plan.

**PAY OFF (V.):** To call a big bet.

**SLOW PLAY (V.):** To refrain from betting or raising in hopes that your opponent will do the betting for you. Also, to give your opponent a chance to make a better hand in order to extract more value.

**TAG (N.):** Tight aggressive player. They play around 20 percent of hands and open raise around 17 percent. This type of player is likely a professional.

**TRAP (V.):** To refrain from betting or raising in hopes that your opponent will do the betting for you. Also, to give your opponent a chance to make a better hand in order to extract more value. Can be used interchangeably with slow play.

**WHALE (N.):** A big fish who plays too many hands in a passive manner without any skill. They are always likely to call big bets with weak hands.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

THE INFORMATION USED to profile a player is not only derived from how they play the game, but also comes from their appearance and general character. For example, an amateur player who likes to chat at the table is likely to be looser than average and predominantly there to have fun. Quiet players are more likely to be conservative. Daniel warns that these are only general stereotypes and emphasizes that the information from how they play their cards is far more reliable.

The first step in profiling your opponents is to pay attention. Everything about them that you can see is free information. You can pick up clues, from how they dress to what their mannerisms are like, that can tell you how they approach life and think about poker. For example, an unkempt person is likely to have discipline issues which

translate into their poker game, whereas a well-kept gentleman in a suit will probably play conservatively. Paying attention between hands is crucial to collecting information on your opponents. When you're not involved in the hand, it is easier to concentrate on picking up new tells. All of this information will be of use in future hands.

Players can be grouped into specific categories, particularly online. Sharks, whales, maniacs, TAGs, LAGs, and recreational players are all common player profiles. There are an infinite number of player types, and individual players can shift between categories depending on how well they are playing. Factors such as tilt can change a TAG player into a maniac. Players are also often a hybrid between two or more common

Player types will change as the stakes increase. In a high-stakes game you are more likely to see skilled players instead of whales. Player tendencies can also change depending on who is in the hand. An opponent may play differently against you than they do against the other players at the table.

Beginners are the easiest player type to play against. The decisions you will have to make will be much simpler than those required against skilled players. Common characteristics of a beginner include being loose, weak, and timid.

When facing a passive player you should give their calls much more credit than you would a TAG player. If a passive player does show aggression then you can assume they have a strong hand because this player type will very rarely bluff, if ever at all. Not paying off this player type in a big pot is key to a high win rate.
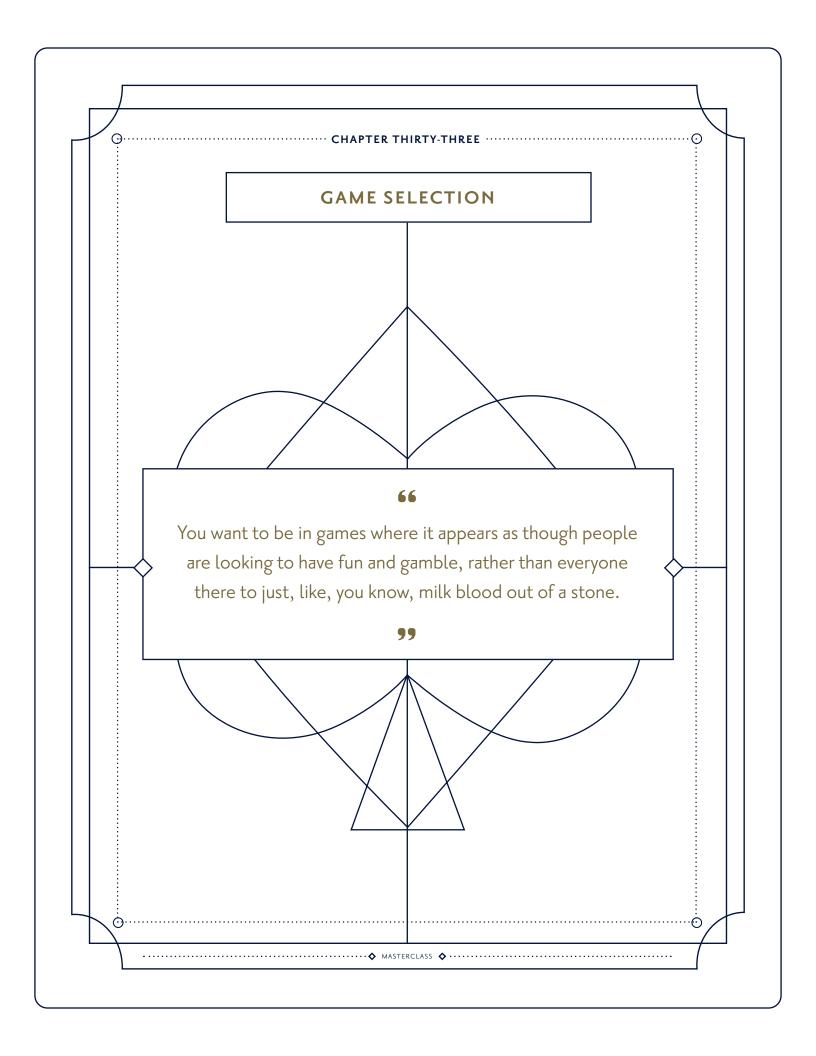
Aggressive players are the toughest player type to play against. One way to defend yourself is to play a tighter range of hands. You can also exploit their aggression by slow playing more often. When a player is being aggressive toward you, you should deviate your strategy the other way to trap them.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Practice profiling players by watching footage of live poker or on Twitch.tv. While it is necessary to have a default strategy in a game with unknown players, your real edge comes from knowing how each opponent plays and exploiting them. You must know their player type.

◇ During your playing sessions remove any distractions to practice observing between hands. In live games, avoid using your phone or tablet; and when you're playing online, don't open a browser.

◇ Watch a skilled player on Twitch.tv to see how they exploit beginners. Most of your profit will come from this player type and it is essential that you aim for maximum profit against them. Do you feel that you are leaving money on the table?

# GAME SELECTION

> "
>
> You want to be in games where it appears as though people are looking to have fun and gamble, rather than everyone there to just, like, you know, milk blood out of a stone.
>
> "

# GAME SELECTION

◇

## CHAPTER REVIEW

IT IS IMPORTANT TO CHOOSE the best games to play in. You have to be honest with yourself about your skill level, because if you play above your weight, you're going to get crushed. As Daniel puts it—you'll lose money if you are the fifth best player in the world but only ever play against the top four. However, playing against opponents who are better than you is part of how you learn. So you want to find games with a good mix of players.

Decide how long your session will be before you sit down to play. Daniel uses a three-question checklist to decide if he will play any longer.

- Am I winning?

- Am I playing well?

- Is the game good?

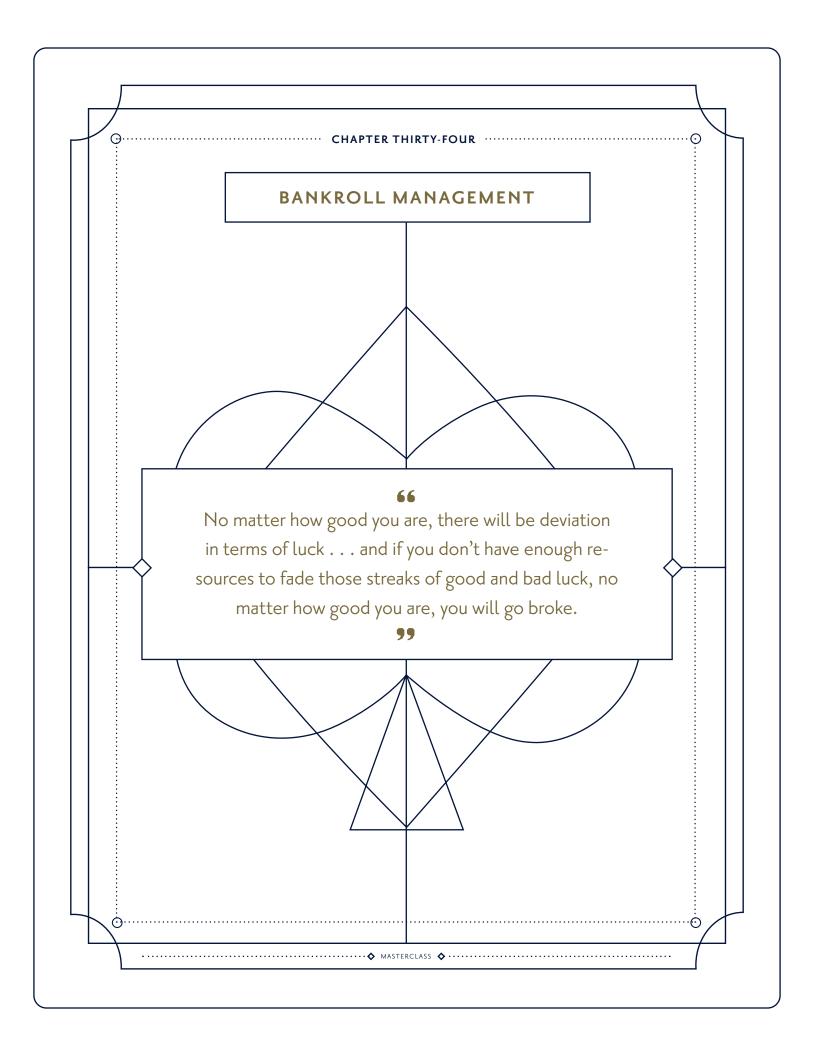If the answer to any of those questions is no, then you should end the session.

If you have a choice of seats in a game you should choose the one that avoids the most pressure situations. An aggressive player to your left can constantly reraise you when they are in position. Conversely, sitting to the left of a weak player is a great seat because you have position and can use that to extract extra profit.

There are a number of things that can indicate how profitable a table might be. For example, a quiet table full of people in sunglasses and headphones who are deliberating over each decision is probably going to be stiff competition. Alternatively, a table with a party atmosphere is more likely to be worth your time.

The more fun people are having, the more profitable the game is likely to be, so it's important to remember that part of your job is to be an entertainer and ensure that the less experienced players are having a good time. Additionally, you don't want to be someone who always takes advantage of weaker players—so be willing to give up a small amount of short-term equity in order to make more money in the long run. Knowing when to quit is also a big part of game selection. If you're winning, it's likely because you're playing better than everyone else at the table, so you want to stay and maximize your profit. You also don't want to quit a game too soon as the big winner. This is known as "hitting and running," and is considered bad form by other players. However, once you start making bad choices and begging for cards, it's probably a good time to step away. It doesn't matter how many sessions you win if you lose all of your profits by playing for too long in a suboptimal state of mind.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Practice observing a game before you sit down. Look for tables where the players are making mistakes; this is your indication that the game is suitable to join. If you can't spot any players that are clearly weaker than you, then you should look for another game or consider the session to be a learning exercise.

◇ Follow Daniel's advice of setting your session times before you sit down to play, and make detailed records of the length of your playing sessions. Assess your performance in relation to session length to find out if you are playing for too long.

# BANKROLL MANAGEMENT

> " No matter how good you are, there will be deviation in terms of luck . . . and if you don't have enough re-sources to fade those streaks of good and bad luck, no matter how good you are, you will go broke. "

# BANKROLL MANAGEMENT

## SUBCHAPTERS

- PREPARE FOR VARIANCE
- THE 20 BUY-IN RULE
- RISK OF RUIN
- KNOW WHEN TO MOVE UP OR DOWN IN STAKES
- ESTABLISH A METRIC FOR TRACKING WIN RATES
- USE CASH GAMES AS YOUR ANCHOR

## TERMS

**WINNING PLAYER (N.):**
Any profitable player.

## CHAPTER REVIEW

IF THERE'S A CONSTANT IN POKER, it's variance. So having a bankroll large enough to withstand the game's natural variance is crucial to success as a professional poker player. You must prepare for periods of a few months in which you make no money and reduce your life expenses to minimize pressure. It doesn't matter how good you are—if your bankroll is too small, you will go broke. For live cash games, you need a bankroll that will cover at least 20 buy-ins. The smaller your skill edge, the larger your bankroll needs to be.

Your risk-of-ruin percentage depends upon the size of your bankroll and your skill level. To decrease your level of risk, you can play with a larger bankroll. The better player you are, the lower the risk of ruin. It goes without saying that this only applies to winning players. No bankroll is big enough for a losing player.
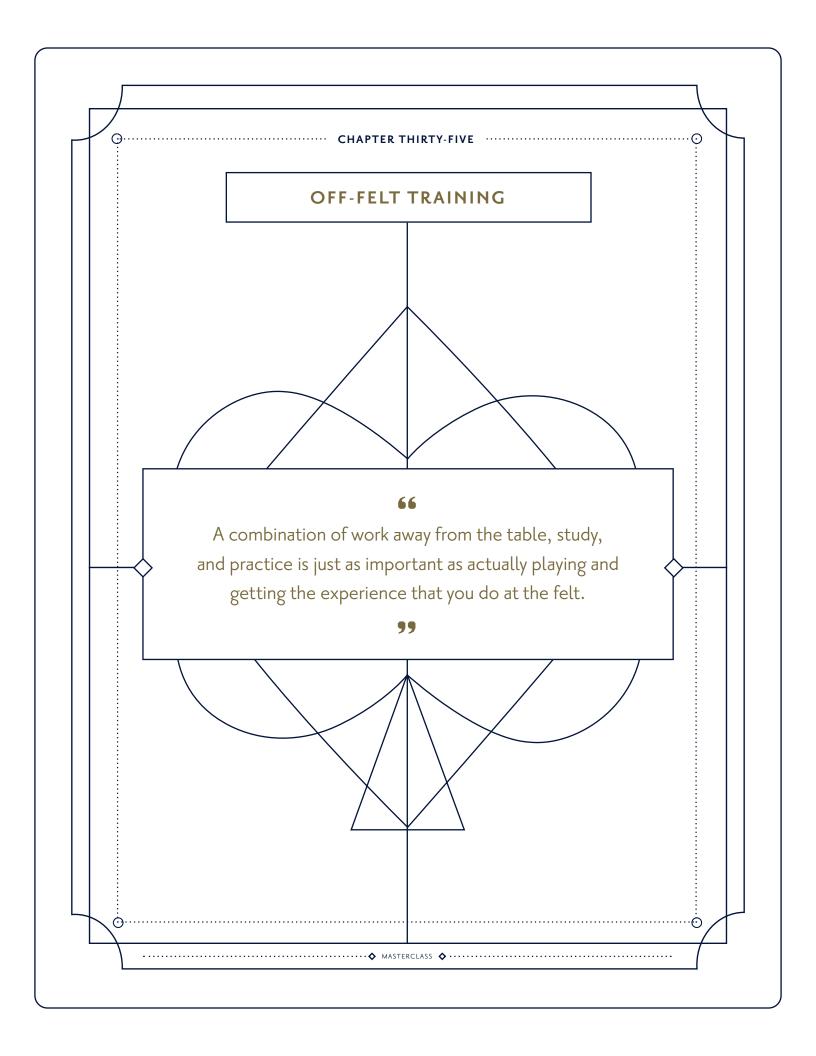
Just because you have a large bankroll, doesn't mean you should move up in stakes. You can take shots and move back down again if your results are poor. Often this process is repeated many times before you move up permanently.

It is important to track your results accurately. Venue, game type, and hours are typical metrics you should record. For online play, you can utilize database software, which calculates your hourly rate and overall win rate. Live players should always keep track of their hourly rate. Cash games should be your anchor when it comes to regular income. Tournaments exhibit much more extreme variance and cannot be relied upon as a source of income for live players. Cash games will allow you to steadily increase your bankroll in a safe way.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Read "An Introduction to Bankroll Management" and "How to Manage Your Poker Bankroll" from Pokernews.com. Both offer additional information about managing your bankroll.

◇ Daniel has gone to great lengths to warn you about the variance in poker tournaments. Examine this analysis and this follow-up to get a clearer understanding of what can be expected.

◇ When you have a big enough bankroll to move up in cash game stakes, take a five buy-in shot, and move down again if it doesn't work. Taking regular shots is the best way to move up the stakes ladder. You will also learn more by playing against better players at higher stakes.

# OFF-FELT TRAINING

> " A combination of work away from the table, study, and practice is just as important as actually playing and getting the experience that you do at the felt. "

# OFF-FELT TRAINING

## SUBCHAPTERS

- PLAY ONLINE TO ACCELERATE YOUR LEARNING

- UTILIZE SOFTWARE TO AID IN YOUR LEARNING PROCESS

- CREATE A BRAIN TRUST

- LEARN THROUGH DRILLS AND REPETITION

- MASTER NEW CONCEPTS BEFORE BRINGING THEM TO THE TABLE

- EXERCISE

- GET SLEEP AND EAT WELL

- USE MEDITATION AND VISUALIZATION

## CHAPTER REVIEW

WORLD-CLASS POKER PLAYERS reach the pinnacle of their careers by working incredibly hard away from the poker table. You have to take the time to work through new concepts and drill the fundamentals of how a certain situation is played, in order to be able to apply that knowledge at game speed. This grind in the lab is just as important as gaining experience over the felt.

Daniel encourages you to make the most of the digital resources available to poker players today. Playing online or watching skilled players on Twitch.tv is one of the best ways to speed up your learning process. Online play is much faster than live games and you're able to play multiple tables at once—and for lower stakes. As such, online experience adds up extremely fast: you could accumulate as much experience by age 23 as legendary player Doyle Brunson did in 60 years. Simulation software also allows you to advance your understanding of how to play various hands.

Daniel also recommends gathering a group of poker players who you can bounce ideas off and learn from. A study session can be as simple as analyzing a single hand—you can spend hours breaking down all of the variables and possible outcomes. Brainstorming with other players is one of the best ways to push yourself to think differently about the game. Remember: It can be

dangerous to apply new concepts in a live game before your knowledge is solid. Work through your weaknesses in practice, but make sure you understand enough before making real moves across the felt.

The world's best players—including Daniel—now approach poker like athletes. To perform well over the course of a grueling tournament, in which days can be 16 hours long, you have to prepare your body and mind. Physical exercise and meditation will help you to achieve your potential.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Read *The Mental Game of Poker* by Jared Tendler and Barry Carter. This modern classic covers in depth the adult learning model and instructs the reader how they can learn in the most efficient way.
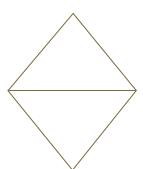
◇ Daniel mentions his time at ChoiceCenter Leadership University. You can investigate the kind of training he went through on their website.
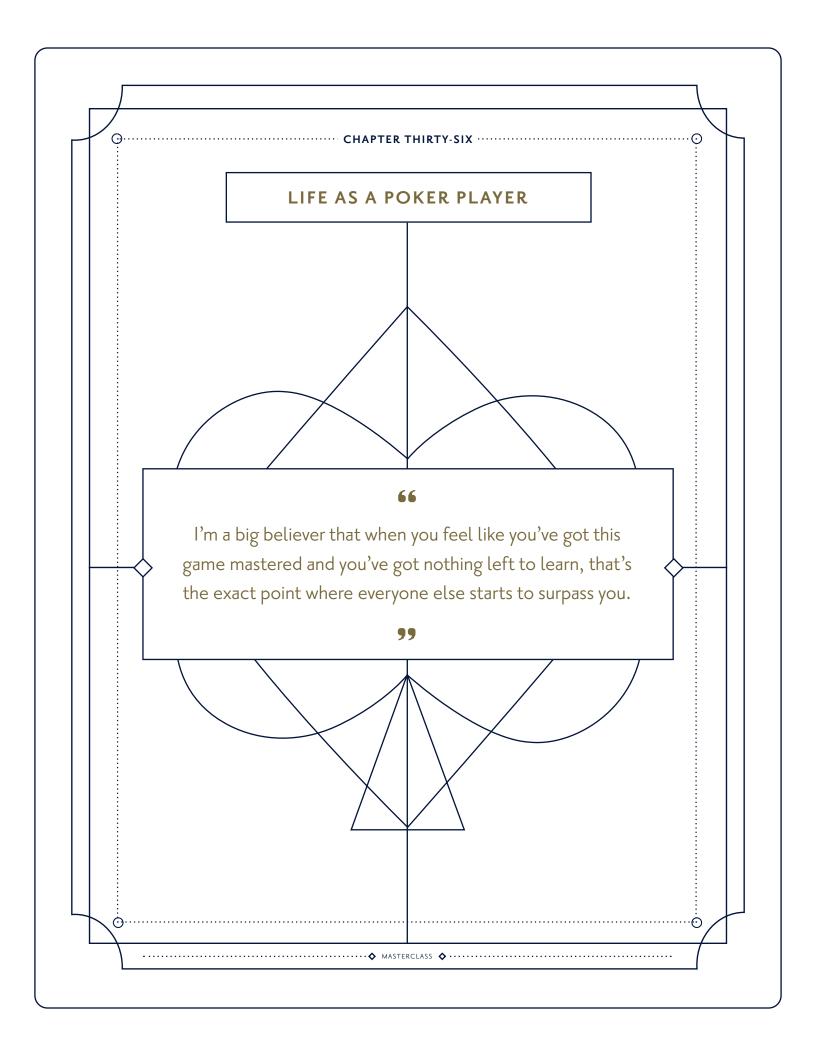
◇ If you've never tried meditation before, try popular apps such as Headspace or Simple Habit to get an introduction to the practice.

◇ Consider the poker techniques you have learned so far in your experience with the game through the lens of Daniel's four-stage learning process. Evaluate which stage of knowledge you're at for each. Can you recall hands you have played that highlight concepts that are not yet at stage four?
Think through specific areas of your game that would benefit from drills in your study time. List them out and prioritize them, creating a study program for yourself.

◇ Follow Daniel's advice and create your own "brain trust," either with other players in your area or via The Hub. Set up an initial study session to discuss past hands and share information. Compare notes on the amount of time you each spend studying versus how much you spending playing. Try to identify the ideal ratio based on your experience level.

# LIFE AS A POKER PLAYER

> **"**
>
> I'm a big believer that when you feel like you've got this game mastered and you've got nothing left to learn, that's the exact point where everyone else starts to surpass you.
>
> **"**

# LIFE AS A POKER PLAYER

## SUBCHAPTERS

- HAVE A PLAN
- BE CONSISTENT AND ALWAYS PLAY TO WIN
- HAVE A BALANCED LIFE

- BE AN ALL-AROUND PLAYER
- BE ADAPTABLE
- THINK OF POKER AS RUNNING A BUSINESS

- ALWAYS LOOK FOR LEAKS IN YOUR GAME
- DON'T PLAY THE VICTIM
- BE EMOTIONALLY STABLE

## CHAPTER REVIEW

IF YOUR AMBITION IS to be a professional poker player, it is important to have a plan for your progression. Success in your poker career will take a lot of hard work and a plan will greatly increase your chances of realizing your goals. Daniel recommends starting with a play/study ratio of around 80/20 for optimum results. In addition, you must bring your A-game to the table consistently. It is also important to lead a balanced life because your mind will perform poorly if overextended.

Tournament players can play cash games to increase their skill level at deep-stack poker. While being predominantly about short-stack play, tournaments do start off with deep stacks. This cross-discipline training is necessary to reach your potential and acts as a safety net if your regular game goes out of fashion. Being an all-round poker player will help your long-term results. Also, you must become adaptable by learning new strategies and counterstrategies, because complacency will lead to you being surpassed as a player.

Treating your poker career as a business is a great way to maximize your income. Keeping detailed records of all your profit/loss figures will allow you to adjust in the most efficient way. Another way to ensure that your business thrives is to analyze playing statistics in order to highlight the leaks in your game. Identifying your leaks is the first step toward fixing them.

Online players can fix leaks quickly because they are able to play a lot of volume. When playing online, you should compare your data against that of the good players you're up against. Try to identify the things that they are doing that you are not, and start incorporating those tactics into your game.
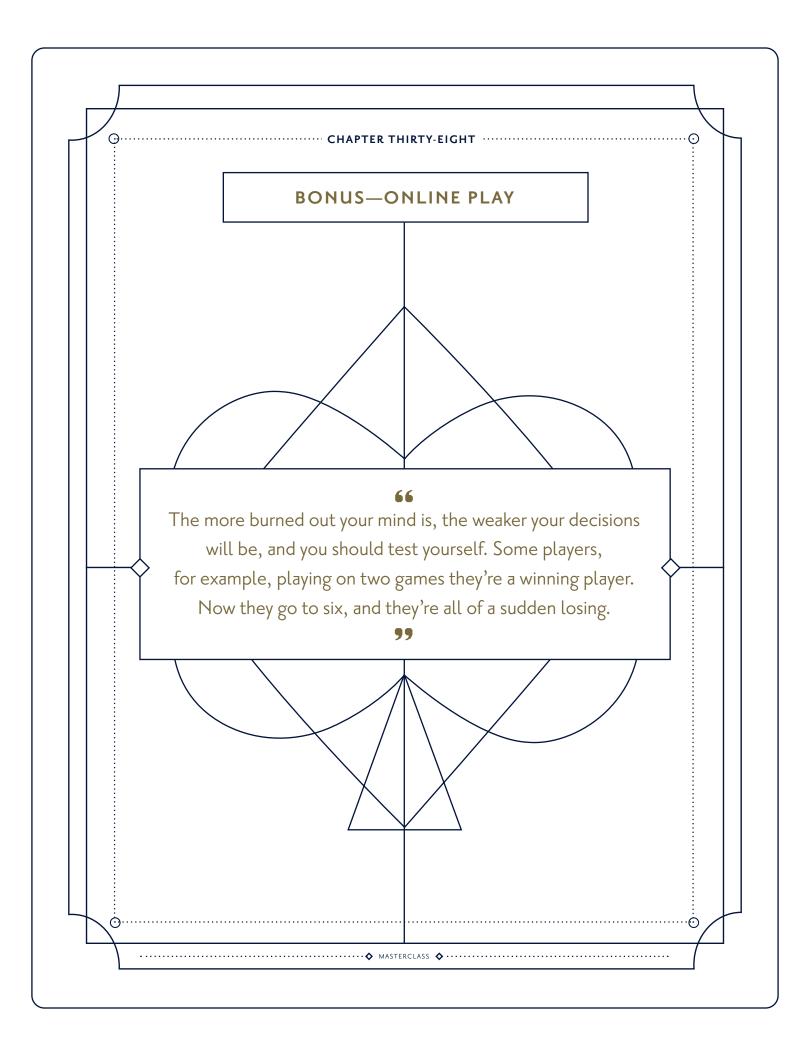
As an elite poker player, you must be self-aware enough to determine if bad beats really are the result of bad luck, or if you're just playing poorly. One way to do this is to discuss bad runs with stronger players to see what they think. Regardless of how you go about it, there is no value in playing the victim. You should always be thinking critically about your game and trying to figure out ways to improve.

Professional poker players do not get a regular paycheck. This lifestyle demands self-discipline and a yearning to rise through the stakes. It is crucial that you never let your ego affect your mindset.

## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Watch this video introduction to leak finding in an online poker database. Database analysis by a skilled player is the fastest way to improve your results once you are past the beginner stage.

◇ Use your notebook to make a framework suitable for recording live poker stats. Discuss the metrics you've chosen with your classmates. While not as accurate as online database software, keeping detailed records is essential for live players. The RunGood app is also worth checking out. More than 160 statistics and custom graphs will help you to break down your results and analyze your game with greater accuracy.

◇ Posting hands on Two Plus Two is a great way to improve and to get validation from stronger players. This is an ideal way to remain confident that you're playing well during a bad run.

# BONUS—ONLINE PLAY

> "
> The more burned out your mind is, the weaker your decisions
> will be, and you should test yourself. Some players,
> for example, playing on two games they're a winning player.
> Now they go to six, and they're all of a sudden losing.
> "

# BONUS—ONLINE PLAY

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## SUBCHAPTERS

• ONLINE IS ALL ABOUT THE NUMBERS

• USE DATA COLLECTION TO TRACK PLAYER TENDENCIES

• BE COGNIZANT OF BURNOUT

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## CHAPTER REVIEW

**ONLINE POKER IS DIFFERENT** from live poker in a few ways. Online cash games are usually a uniform 100 big blinds and GTO/math-based with tight-aggressive players, whereas in a live game, you will sometimes see 1000 big blind stacks in a much more casual atmosphere.

There are advantages and disadvantages to online play. For example, while it is possible to play a lot of hands in a short space of time, this encourages players to play a tighter style. Players are rarely affected by boredom because of this, making it tougher to profit overall.

Even though physical tells don't play a part in the online game, you can use timing tells. Sometimes a player will deviate from their normal pattern giving you additional information. There is also all the data collection available through database software. Stats can be overlaid on your table to show your opponents' tendencies.

It is important to play the right number of tables to suit your goals. If you want your win rate to be at its highest possible point, only play a single table. Each table you add will reduce your edge, as your brain struggles to process the additional information. Be wary of the mental burnout that can happen if you play a lot of tables at the same time. Mental burnout can lead you to play on autopilot, and if you play on autopilot for too long, you can also unwittingly reinforce bad habits. If you feel you are struggling to keep up, scale back your volume.

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## UP YOUR GAME

◇ Watch a player on Twitch.tv paying close attention to the timing of decisions. Can you correlate any patterns between the length of time taken and the strength of the player's hand? You can also try to manipulate your opponents by switching up your own decision time in a specific situation.

◇ It is important to avoid burnout from playing excessive volume online. Start your online career by playing only a single table and build up from there. Keep a record of how clearly you can think as you add more tables. Make sure not to increase the number too quickly.