**Introduction**

This course will guide you step-by-step from the early stages of a **big-field tournament** to the final table. Key topics include:

* **Opening Strategies** – differences between cash games and tournaments. Playing deep stack in the opening levels with selective aggression and sound open-raise and 3-bet sizing strategies.
* **Early to Middle Stage** – learn how to read hands in the early stages. Understand how to maneuver a short stack should you find your stack dwindling. Conversely, understand how to leverage a big stack to accumulate chips early on.
* **Around the Bubble** – how to avoid going broke on the bubble without crawling into a min-cash. Using techniques for abusing the bubble, managing the mess after players make the money, and surviving when the dust has settled, and the competition intensifies.
* **Running Deep** – start building a stack that will carry you to the final table by learning the dynamics of the resteal zone, double zone, and final table bubble.
* **The Final Table** – learn to navigate increasingly short-handed play as you approach the heads-up battle for the top prize.

**Starting Strategies**

One of the most critical skills required to beat big-field tournaments, yet one that is largely ignored in most training material, is an ability to accurately profile opponents. After developing player profiles, it then becomes critical to exploit their particular weaknesses.

**Introduction to Tournaments**

This course will focus on the skills involved in a typical $1K buy-win WSOP tournament because these tournaments tend to be a lot softer than cash games. In tournaments, stack size, both your own stack and that of your opponents, is everything. This is because the poker weapons you attack with and defend against depend on relative stack sizes. It is therefore helpful to segment stack sizes into different groups:

* **Vert Short Stack (0–5 BB)** – **Value Hunting** - look for isolation, use their stacks (not yours), look to your left, and remember that you don’t have to be a favorite.
* **Short Stack (5–10 BB)** – **Push/Fold** – be first in, attack tight blinds, know your push/fold ranges, and use the simple chart.
* **Upper Short Stack (10–20 BB)** – **Resteal** – reraise all-in, attack loose openers, use fear, and avoid early position raisers.
* **Moderate Stack (20–30 BB)** – don’t 3-bet in this zone unless you are willing to get all-in. If you fold after your 3-bet gets bumped by a 4-bet, it is a disaster scenario since your 3-bet winds up decimating your stack.

When you have more than 30 BB you can start playing poker because all options are available at these stack depths. Just remember, protect your stack, and don’t bluff off your chips just because you have them. Keep the **5% Rule** in mind, which is a helpful guide for choosing spots with a speculative hand → when you have to commit less than 5% of your stack and the situation looks good.

**Introduction to Tournaments (continued)**

***Tournament Player Profiles***

* **Golfer Guy** (**pGG**) – tight, aggressive, likes to win, plays reasonably well, can get sticky with his hand.
* **Backpack** (**pBP**) – came to play seriously, professional player, plays well but not at super expert level.
* **Old Man Coffee** (**pOMC**) – tight, careful, won’t get out of line, predictable ranges, not bluffing a lot.
* **Headphones Hannah** (**pHH**) – better player than backpack and a tough player.
* **Nice Nelly** (**pNN**) – touristy, talkative, congenial, predictable, doesn’t want to rock anyone’s boat.
* **Tourist Tom** (**pTT**)– wants to beat people but has no idea how to do that because he lacks skill.
* **WSOP Hoodie** (**pWSOP**) – intermediate and very interested in the game but lacks deep knowledge.
* **Scared Sam (pSS)** – doesn’t like to put chips into the pot, eternal pessimist who folds a lot.
* **Aggro Al (pAA)** – likes to push people off hands, bluffs, aggressive, doesn’t want to be embarrassed.

**Deep Stack, Early-Stage Play**

Let’s examine which hands play well in early deep-stacked spots and how the type of player and their position shapes your calling and 3-betting ranges when facing an open. Even with fairly limited information on our opponents, hand-reading skills can greatly improve how we navigate deep-stacked situations.

* pOMC raises 4x BB from UTG. We have 6♠6♥ on the button. Flop → Q♠4♥T♦
  + This is larger than a standard RFI, but several things work in our favor from LP. pOMC is predictable and from UTG he has a strong hand ~3%. If everyone folds, we should call his raise since we are deep stacked with position. Reraising doesn’t serve a purpose, since he has a real hand and if we bloat the pot preflop, then postflop betting can quickly become dicey.
  + The flop unfortunately is bad for us because it hits pOMC’s range way too often to make calling a reasonable bet from pOMC profitable. If he puts in a healthy c-bet, we should fold. If he c-bets light, implied odds may warrant a call → if we hit a 6 on the turn, the 6 won’t complete pOMC hand in any way and at that point we would have to worry about a set or a draw.
* pBP standard opens from MP. pNN, 3-bets 5x pBP’s open from lojack. We have 4♠6♣ on the button.
  + pNN’s raise should scream trouble. pNN is 3-betting here with 3%. We should fold with anything 3%–. First, pNN’s raise crosses the 5% Rule and makes our speculative hand too costly to flat. Second, we have to worry if pBP 4-bets with 3%+. Third, even with position, only a very strong preflop hand can compensate for the pNN’s range and pBP’s presence. Fourth, pNN’s big 3-bet affirms her pessimism since she doesn’t want to tango with pBP or anyone else since she’s gotten burned way too often and would prefer to just take the pot down preflop.
* pBP puts is a standard RFI from MP. We’re in the hijack with 3♠3♦.
  + We let this hand go because pBP’s RFI suggests a strong range (any pair, AXs, AXo, Broadway). Furthermore, although we’d have position on pBP, the cutoff, button, and blinds are still left to act. We don’t know yet what players behind are going to do and if we do get involved, any one of those players will have dominant position. Also, if we do flop a set and we’re heads-up with pBP, he is good enough that we’re not going to extract enough money from him to compensate for making the call. Note that if were in the blinds, we’d make this call.

**Deep Stack, Early-Stage Play (continued)**

* We have K♦K♥ in EP. Flop → A♠J♠4♦
  + Standard raise here is 3x. We get a call from pOMC, pSS, and pBP from HJ, CO and BB respectively. pBP is a solid player and will most likely check the flop to us. He does this to get relative position and observe the action of all three players behind. Statistically speaking, with three other players, there is a good chance that at least one player has an ace (*calculate this probability*). So, a strong bet by pOMC or pSS and a flat or raise by pBP devalues our pocket kings and we should fold. Not that pOMC and pSS are going to bet for value whereas pBP is going to call or raise with a wide range with a lot of potential to crack our kings by the river.
* We have A♠4♠ in EP. Flop → A♠J♠4♦
  + ***Fill in this analysis later…***

**Selective Aggression**

Aggressive poker is winning poker. But mindless aggression is reckless and simply a great way to spew your chips away.

♣♦♥♠

Position and Betting Patterns

3-Bet Sizing

Early to Middle Stage

Hand Reading in Early Stages

Getting Short Early

Cruising Along

The Boss Stack

Around the Bubble

The Mess

After the Mess

Running Deep

Final Table Bubble

Getting Deep and value Hunting

Push / Fold: Playing the Short Stack

The Resteal Zone

The Double Zone

The Final Table

The Final Table – Part 1

The Final Table – Part 2

Closing It Out

Finding Value in Tournaments