Briefing Document: When to Turn Bluff Catchers Into Bluffs in Poker

This briefing document summarizes key insights from Maron's "When to Turn Bluff Catchers Into BLUFFS (Simple Guide)," a guide for poker players on optimizing their river play by understanding when to convert a bluff catcher into a bluff. Maron, a professional poker player with over seven figures in earnings, emphasizes that the profitability of this play hinges on understanding an opponent's betting range on the river.

Core Principle: Opponent's River Betting Range

The central theme of the guide is that the decision to turn a bluff catcher into a bluff depends on whether the opponent is betting the river "thinly for value" or "more polarized."

* **Thin Value Betting:** When an opponent is betting thinly for value (e.g., with top pair, top kicker), turning a showdown value hand into a bluff is "often the most profitable play." In such scenarios, the opponent's range includes hands that are strong but not absolute nuts, and thus vulnerable to a large raise.
* **Polarized Betting:** Conversely, when an opponent's river bet is "more polarized," meaning they are "repping a very strong hand or air," it is "probably not the best idea to go for the bluff raise." In these situations, a raise will either be called by a monster hand or fold out air that the bluff catcher already beats.

When NOT to Turn a Bluff Catcher into a Bluff

Maron provides two primary examples where bluff-raising a bluff catcher is not advisable:

1. **Opponent Repping a Polarized Range (Example 1: Ace-King Expectation):**

* **Scenario:** A 3-bet pot where the villain (recreational player) calls a flop c-bet and the turn checks back. On the river, the villain bets a small-to-medium size (40-60% pot).
* **Reasoning:** The villain, having seen the pre-flop 3-bet and flop c-bet followed by a turn check-back, often puts the player on Ace-King. Therefore, their river bet, even if small, is signaling either "I can beat Ace-King or I can't." Maron states: "When they come out and bet this river is either I can beat ace king or I can't."
* **Outcome of Raising:** Raising in this scenario "is either going to be a bluff which I would expect it to be with this sizing... or it could be some 6X it could be some Straits or it could be some full houses." However, the range is "weighted way way way more towards Bluffs than I would expect it to be weighted towards full houses or trips." Since the opponent's range is polarized (bluff or monster), a bluff raise "doesn't really accomplish a whole hell of a lot." It will only fold out bluffs you already beat or get snapped off by monsters.
* **Recommendation:** Call in this spot, especially if the opponent is prone to "overbluffing." If the opponent is "under bluffing," folding the bluff catcher might be more profitable than calling.

1. **Opponent's Range is Very Polarized and Underbluffed (Example 2: Triple Broadway Board):**

* **Scenario:** Player check-raises big on the flop with a combo draw, binks top pair on the turn, checks, and calls a turn bet. On a triple Broadway river, the opponent bets a significant size.
* **Bluff Catching Checklist Analysis:** Maron uses a "handy dandy Bluff catching checklist":
* **Beat value?** "No we don't beat any value." Opponent's range is likely 2-pair+ or nothing.
* **Capable of bluffing?** "Most villains are probably not capable of bluffing this spot" given the aggression shown by the player and the scary board.
* **Gave them rope?** "We gave them a little bit of rope by checking the turn but remember we were the pre-Flop Razer we check raised the Flop huge."
* **Size significant?** "Yes the size is significant."
* **Non-showdown value?** "Really the only non-Showdown value hands they would have here would be smaller Diamond draws... so not a ton of Bluffs here."
* **Reasoning:** The opponent's range is "very very polarized right they either have two pair like a hand like Ace Queen a set like a hand like fours or Deuces or they have absolutely nothing." Maron concludes: "I do not think I would be Bluff raising in this spot ever because it just doesn't really accomplish much if we raise here well we're just folding out all of the hands that we beat anyway... and we're just getting snapped off by two pair or sets."
* **Recommendation:** Lean towards folding if the pool is underbluffing, as "taking every Bluff catcher and turning it into a fold is more profitable than calling."

When to Turn a Bluff Catcher into a Bluff

Maron identifies two scenarios where bluff-raising can be highly profitable:

1. **Opponent Thinly Betting Value (Example 3: Small River Bet in Position):**

* **Scenario:** Single-raise pot, player checks range on the flop with top pair, calls flop and turn bets. On the river, the opponent bets a small size (e.g., $80 into $287).
* **Reasoning:** "The small size on the River from live poker players in general is usually just going to be thin value hands that are just pretty scared of maybe getting raised." This is driven by "fear and greed." Fear makes them bet smaller with hands like Ace-Queen or King-Queen, scared of stronger hands. Greed makes them bet larger with monsters. "When our opponent is repping a more thin linear range when they could be betting top pair top kicker that's a pretty good time to turn our Bluff catcher into a bluff."
* **Opponent Tendencies:** Opponents "under bluffing" on triple barrel lines.
* **Outcome of Raising:** Maron believes opponents "will find folds with hands as strong as Ace queen king queen queen Jack on this River almost all the time if you lay down the hammer and choose the big boy size and you're just not going to run into a brick wall all that often because when opponents do have a flush a straight or a set on this River they will generally just go bigger."
* **Recommendation:** Turn the bluff catcher into a big bluff raise.

1. **Opponent Betting with Non-Nut Sets (Example 4: Check-Raise, Barrel, Thin River Bet):**

* **Scenario:** 3-bet pot, player (with Pocket Aces) calls a flop check-raise and turn bet. On a Ten of Hearts river, the opponent bets a small size (e.g., $300 into $1047).
* **Reasoning:Flush Draws:** Live poker opponents "don't check raise their draws enough," so flushes are less likely. If they had a flush, they'd likely bet bigger.
* **Overpairs:** Unlikely to bet thinly on the river.
* **Likely Range:** "Sets and air and it's going to mostly be weighted towards sets."
* **Key Insight:** Even sets (like pocket eights, fours, or tens on an 8-4-2-3-T board with a heart) are "not anywhere close to the nuts." Many opponents "would strongly consider folding hands like pocket eights pocket fours pocket 10 if we put all the money in."
* **Logical Consistency Test:** If the opponent flipped over pocket fours and the player had pocket eights, would they go all-in for value? If players in the pool fold sets, then bluff-raising is profitable.
* **Blockers:** Maron downplays the relevance of blockers (like Ace of Hearts) in this specific spot because the opponent's range is unlikely to include flushes given their line and sizing.
* **Recommendation:** If the opponent is capable of folding sets, turn any hand that doesn't beat a set (like Pocket Aces) into an all-in bluff.

Sizing Strategy for Bluffs and Value Raises

Maron concludes with a crucial rule of thumb regarding sizing when raising the river:

* **Opponent Repping a Thin Value Range (e.g., Top Pair, Top Kicker):**
* **Bluffs:** "Our Bluffs want to go huge." This maximizes fold equity against hands that are strong but not invulnerable.
* **Value:** "Our value wants to go small." This encourages calls from weaker hands the player wants to get value from.
* **Opponent Repping a Polarized Range (e.g., Nuts or Air):**
* **Bluffs:** "Our Bluffs should be very very small." A minimal raise is often enough to fold out air, while minimizing losses against the nuts. "We can literally just click it 2X and get them to fold all of their air maybe their air that we lose to."
* **Value:** "Our value should be the biggest size possible." When the opponent is polarized, if they have a strong hand (but not the absolute nuts), they are unlikely to fold, so the player should aim to extract maximum value.

In essence, Maron's guide provides a framework for intelligently converting bluff catchers into bluffs by analyzing opponent tendencies, their perceived hand range, and adjusting raise sizing accordingly. The ultimate goal is to exploit situations where opponents are vulnerable to large bluffs with non-nut holdings or to extract maximum value when the opponent is polarized and unlikely to fold.