This briefing document summarizes key strategies for "bluff busting" in live poker, based on the provided excerpts from "BLUFF BUSTING: Catch Bluffs Like a Poker Pro (5 Step Guide)." It covers common bluffing tendencies of live players and introduces a systematic five-question checklist for deciding whether to bluff catch on the river, along with a bonus question about bluff raising.

Briefing Document: Bluff Busting in Live Poker

**Source:** Excerpts from "BLUFF BUSTING: Catch Bluffs Like a Poker Pro (5 Step Guide)"

**Date:** October 26, 2023

**Topic:** Identifying and Responding to Bluffs in Live Poker

1. The Reality of Bluffing in Live Poker

A common misconception is that "live poker players do not Bluff." However, the reality is the opposite: **"live poker players Bluff a lot."** The key distinction is that they "rarely Bluff for large sizes or when we appear very strong." Understanding *when* and *where* live players bluff is crucial for effective bluff catching.

2. Five Common Scenarios Where Live Poker Players Bluff

Live poker players are more likely to bluff in the following situations:

* **When they look weak:** This includes instances where they "check back of Street," "just check call," or "use very small bet sizes." This suggests they are trying to appear non-threatening before launching a bluff.
* **In heads-up pots:** Bluffing is "much easier to get a bluff through" against a single opponent compared to multi-way pots with many players.
* **In smaller pots or on earlier streets:** Players are "much more likely to Bluff on earlier streets say pre- flop or on the Flop than they are on the turn or the river." The absolute size of the bluff is smaller in these spots, making it less risky.
* **When they have wide ranges:** This includes "limp pots" or "single raise pots" rather than "three bet pots" or "four bet pots." They are also more prone to bluffing in "late vers late spot cut off versus button than they are in an early vers early spot under the gun versus lowjack." A guiding question here is: "is there a decent part of the range that doesn't have Showdown value?" If so, bluffs are more likely.
* **When they are "losing, stuck or tilting":** Emotional states significantly influence bluffing behavior. Players are less likely to bluff when they are "up big or having a good session."

3. The Five-Question Bluff Catching Checklist (and a Bonus Question)

The "Hungry Horse poker" method for systematic bluff catching on the river involves a repeatable thought process guided by five key questions:

1. **Do we beat value?** This assesses whether the opponent's range contains hands that your bluff catcher can beat if they are value betting. The source notes that players might "massively under bluffing" or "never bluffing" but still "overvaluing a hand."
2. **Are they capable?** This is a crucial assessment of the specific opponent's tendencies. "Essentially is this particular opponent capable of bluffing in this line for this size?" If the answer to this and question #1 (not beating value) is "no," then it's an "easy decision" to fold.
3. **Did we give them rope?** This refers to actions that might have encouraged a bluff, such as "check back a street," "just check call the entire time from out of position," or "use a very small size on the Flop that maybe induce them to spaz." It's about whether you "open the door" or "give them the green light."
4. **Is the size significant for the game?** This considers the absolute size of the bet. It's "much more rare to find the archetype that's going to pull the trigger for an overb Bluff or a 200 big blind Bluff on the river." Smaller bluffs on earlier streets are more common.
5. **Do they have non-Showdown value hands?** This asks if their range plausibly contains "busted six High straight draws," "busted King High flesh draws," or other hands that are "intuitive to turn into Bluffs in this spot."

**Bonus Question 6: Is Bluff Raising More Profitable?** This question encourages considering all options beyond just calling. Sometimes, turning your hand into a bluff by raising can be more profitable than a simple bluff call, especially if you believe the opponent will fold a stronger hand to a large raise.

4. Application Examples

The source provides several practical examples to illustrate the checklist's application:

* **Example 1: Button vs. Big Blind (Check-back turn with Showdown Value)**
* **Scenario:** You open with Ace-Deuce of diamonds, villain calls. You bet flop, villain calls. You check back turn with bottom pair, villain bets river.
* **Analysis:**Beat value: No.
* Capable: Possibly.
* Gave rope: Yes, by checking back the turn.
* Size significant: No ($40 bet in a 2/5 game).
* Non-Showdown value: Yes (e.g., busted draws, ace-high floats).
* **Conclusion:** "This looks like a pretty easy Bluff catch spot." This line is identified as "one of the most profitable lines in live poker" because players "massively over Bluff" when given rope in wide versus wide configurations, leading to too many non-showdown hands on the river.
* **Example 2: Big Blind Defense (Check-call twice, check river)**
* **Scenario:** Villain opens button, you defend Big Blind with Ace-Eight of Clubs, flop middle pair with flush draw. You check-call flop and turn, check river, villain bets half pot.
* **Analysis:**Beat value: Probably not.
* Capable: Yes (unless "old man coffee").
* Gave rope: Yes, by check-calling multiple streets.
* Size significant: No ($85 bet in a 2/5 game).
* Non-Showdown value: Yes (e.g., busted flush draws).
* **Conclusion:** "four out of the five questions on the bluff catching checklist" lead to a call.
* **Example 3: King-Queen of Diamonds (Check-raise flop, check-call turn, check river)**
* **Scenario:** You open King-Queen of Diamonds from lowjack, villain calls button. You check-raise flop (Queen-7-4) to a large size, villain calls. Turn Ace of Diamonds, you check, villain bets chunky. You check-call. River a blank, you check, villain bets large.
* **Analysis:**Beat value: Probably not (worst hands betting are Ace-Queen, Pocket Fours).
* Capable: Assume capable.
* Gave rope: Absolutely not (check-raised flop, ballooned pot).
* Size significant: Yes ($650 bet, over 100 big blinds).
* Non-Showdown value: Not much (e.g., only 5-6 suited remaining after large check-raise call).
* Bluff raising more profitable: No, unlikely villain folds a set to an all-in.
* **Conclusion:** "Bluff catching in this particular spot is not profitable." Even with two pair, it's a "bluff catcher" here, and if the spot is under-bluffed, "every Bluff catcher should be f[old]."
* **Example 4: Pocket Aces (Three-bet pre, bet flop, call turn, check river)**
* **Scenario:** You have Pocket Aces, three-bet pre-flop, villain calls. Flop 8-4-2, you bet 1/3 pot, villain check-raises. You call. Turn 3, villain bets, you call. River 10 of Hearts, villain bets.
* **Analysis:**Beat value: No (villain's line indicates strong value; sets, no overvalued Jacks/Tens).
* Capable: Assume capable.
* Gave rope: Absolutely not (aggressively played from pre-flop).
* Size significant: Leans towards yes ($300, 60 big blinds, absolute size more important than relative).
* Non-Showdown value: No (all draws got there or were unlikely to take this line).
* **Conclusion:** "Bluff catching is not profitable."
* **Bonus Question (Bluff Raising):** This example heavily emphasizes the sixth question. The source argues that live players generally "under check raise" flush draws and tend to "use a bigger size when they hit the flush." Therefore, it's unlikely the villain has many flushes in this line. The decision then shifts to whether to fold Aces or turn them into a bluff by jamming, assuming the opponent folds sets. This depends on player tendencies, but it highlights the need to "always ask that sixth question."

5. Key Takeaways

* Live poker players do bluff, but often in specific scenarios (weak appearance, heads-up, smaller pots, wide ranges, emotional states).
* The five-question checklist provides a structured approach to river bluff catching.
* "Giving rope" (passive play) often encourages bluffs.
* The absolute size of a bluff is a strong indicator of its legitimacy; large river bluffs are rare.
* Identifying non-showdown value in an opponent's range is critical for bluff potential.
* Always consider "Is bluff raising more profitable?" as an alternative to bluff catching, especially when a bluff call appears unprofitable.
* A hand that looks strong (like two pair or an overpair) can become a "bluff catcher" if it doesn't beat any of the opponent's value range in an under-bluffed spot, leading to a profitable fold.