Live Poker Pre-Flop Strategy: A Detailed Briefing

This briefing document summarizes key pre-flop strategies for live poker, emphasizing adaptations for high-rake environments and various player types. It draws heavily from the "Live Poker PREFLOP BIBLE" excerpts, providing actionable advice and specific "red flags" to observe.

I. Core Principles for a Top-Tier Pre-Flop Win Rate

The foundation of strong live poker play lies in a dialed-in pre-flop strategy. The text likens this to building a skyscraper with a solid foundation, asserting that neglecting pre-flop is like using "a foundation made of beans." The strategies presented are specifically "custom built... for live poker," distinguishing them from typical online, 6-Max, 100BB-based ranges.

Five Big-Picture Takeaways:

1. **Aggression is Key in High-Rake Environments:** In live games, where rake significantly impacts profitability, it's crucial to "be the one making an aggressive action." This means "be the one raising, be the one three betting, be the one taking the aggressive action," and "eliminate most limping and calling from your pre-flop game." The goal is to make pots bigger to minimize the rake's effect.
2. **Isolate Fish: Three-Bet or Fold vs. Recreational Players:** When a "fish or recreational player come in for a raise," the default strategy should be "three bet or fold." The greatest edge is realized by getting "pots heads up in position" against weaker players, avoiding multi-way pots. Exceptions include being on the button or in the big blind.
3. **Flat vs. Strong Pros to Entrap Fish:** Conversely, when a "strong Pro opens," a significant amount of flatting (calling) is recommended. This is done "to let the fish in the pot because those are going to be the players who are going to make the most mistakes post flop and where our win rate is going to come from."
4. **Player Type Over Positional Configuration:** Live poker ranges should be based on opponent tendencies rather than rigid positional configurations. "Most recreational players or fish are not taking positional configuration into account." Instead, focus on "playing against the player type and the ranges they are playing." For instance, a tight fish often opens the same range from various positions.
5. **Adjusting Ranges for Stack Depth:** The provided ranges are designed for 200 big blind (BB) poker.

* **Deeper Stacks:** Favor "hands that are suited and can make the nuts and cooler your opponents."
* **Shallower Stacks:** Favor "hands that can just make very strong top pair hands," such as "more offsuit Broadways."

II. Pre-Flop Hand Ranges and Adjustments

A. Open Ranges

* **Early Position (EP):** Very tight, approximately 12% of hands. Primarily strong suited cards (Ace-9 suited+, wheel Aces), suited Broadways, and suited connectors (e.g., 56s, 76s, 87s). Offsuit Broadways (KQo, AJo) are generally *not* opened.
* **Shallow Stack Adjustment (80-100 BBs):** "Fold all of these suited connectors" and "start opening these off suit Broadways Ace Jack and king queen," as top pair with a good kicker becomes strong enough for all-in play.
* **Hijack:** Wider than EP, approximately 20%. Includes pocket fours+, more Ace-X/King-X/Queen-X suited, and more offsuit Broadways (KQo, AJo, KJo, ATo).
* **Button:** Very wide, around 44% for players with a "moderate post flop Edge." Can be even wider, "almost opening nearly 100%" if "two very very passive fish in the blinds" are present and you have a significant edge. This includes many double and triple gapper suited hands.

B. Isolating Limpers (ISO)

* **EP vs. Limper:** "Pretty tight," similar to the EP open range. Concerns about multiple players behind with premium hands. Partial hands (e.g., 77, 98s, A4s) are ISO'd based on stack depth, skill edge against the limper, and whether the limper folds their mediocre hands to a raise. "Do not randomize live if you randomize live you are a fish."
* **Button vs. Limper:** "Much much wider" than EP ISO, but not as wide as a button open range. Still requires "pretty good hands" as limpers generally don't limp-fold. Wider range is possible due to fewer players behind. Decisions on partial hands depend on skill edge, stack depth, limper's position, and blind aggression.

C. Continuing vs. Opens

* **General Rule (not Button/BB, vs. Fish):** "Generally want to play three bet or fold" against a fish or recreational player's open, aiming for heads-up, in-position play. The default continue range from the Hijack is "pretty tight" against an average recreational player's open.
* **Button vs. Aggressive Recreational Player:** Can go "pretty pretty wide" with 3-betting. While 3-bet or fold is preferred, "can occasionally work in some Flats" due to absolute post-flop position.
* **Button vs. Tight Recreational Player:** If a tight player opens a very strong range (e.g., 7.5% RFI), continue "pretty pretty tight as a three bet." This is a scenario where "more Flats" might be worked in, as you don't want to 3-bet a super strong range. Generally avoid flatting against a fish's open unless on the button or in the big blind.

D. Big Blind Defense (vs. 4x Open, 200 BBs Deep)

* **Vs. Tight Recreational Player (e.g., 7.5% RFI):** Primarily "continuing as a call quite a lot" with only "very very good hands" being 3-bet. Three-betting is "linear" (good, better, best hands) without many bluffs because tight players "generally just continue too much." No suited connector 3-bet bluffs here.
* **Vs. Aggressive Recreational Player (e.g., 30% RFI):** "Getting a little bit more crazy," with "a ton of three betting." The 3-bet range is "very linear" (good, better, best) because "all of these hands are performing pretty well." Mostly defending as a 3-bet rather than a call, to "play bigger pots against Bad players to minimize the effect of rake."

E. Squeezing (Open + Cold Call, then Squeeze)

* **General Strategy:** "Linear" range (good, better, best). No weak suited connectors or bluffs. The presence of a cold caller signifies "a lot of dead money out there" and that the cold caller generally "doesn't have very many strong strong hands." The goal is to "outperform both the opener and the cold caller."

III. Playing vs. 3-Bets and 4-Bets

A. Vs. 3-Bet (Out of Position)

* **Vs. Passive Player:** "Not going to be doing a lot of four betting" as they 3-bet too tight. Preferring pairs and small suited connectors over offsuit Broadways (AQo, KQo, AJo, which are all folded). Decisions on borderline calls depend on skill edge, opponent predictability post-flop, and stack depth.
* **Vs. Aggressive Player:** "Continuing a little bit wider" and "forbeting quite a bit more." Crucially, 4-betting a "linear range" (good, better, best) because aggressive players are likely to call 4-bets in position. Avoid 4-bet bluffing with hands like A2s or A6s, instead focusing on hands like AQs or KQs that dominate their likely calling range.

B. Vs. 3-Bet (In Position)

* **General:** "Continue much wider" and can do "a lot more calling." Less incentive to 4-bet as the out-of-position player isn't going to call as much.
* **Pocket Aces:** Always 4-bet pure when 200 BBs deep to "cooler their kings... Ace King suited... Queens." "Do not trap pocket aces if you are plus big blinds deep." (Note: Trapping Aces at 50-60 BBs depth is deemed okay).
* **Range Type:** One of the *only* scenarios for a "polarized range" 4-bet (very strongest hands + weakest continuing hands like A5s, A9s, KTs, 87s). The decision to use these polarized bluffs depends on how often the opponent 3-bets and folds to a 4-bet. If they rarely fold, cut out the bluffs.
* **Vs. Aggressive Player:** "Continuing pretty pretty wide." The top and bottom of the 4-bet range expand. More "polar four bet Bluffs" are included (e.g., A2s, A6s, A7s) because aggressive players "have a lot of hands that have to fold."
* **Key Distinction:** "When we are out of position we generally want a four bet linear good better and best and when we're in position that's when we can work in some of these more polarized forb Bluffs."

C. Cold 4-Betting (Open + 3-Bet, then you 4-Bet)

* **Strategy:** "Either a cold four bet... or a fold." Cold calling 3-bets in this scenario is discouraged because the original opener can 4-bet (shutting you out) and your range becomes "easy to play against" (often Jacks, Tens, Nines, AKo, suited Broadways without the very top).
* **Range Adjustment:** Based on the 3-bettor's tendencies. A tight 3-bettor means a tight cold 4-bet range. An aggressive 3-bettor allows for a wider cold 4-bet range. Regardless, it should consist of "kind of our very best hands." No bluffs like A4s or A3s if folding ATo.

D. Continuing vs. 4-Bet

* **Vs. Passive Player:** "Continuing very very tight." Passive players 4-bet a "very very strong range" (KK, AK, QQ, AA). If they rarely bluff 4-bet, "we could just pretty much be folding everything except Kings plus."
* **Vs. Aggressive Player:** Continue "just a little bit wider."
* **5-Betting:** Only 5-bet "Aces." The author acknowledges this is unbalanced but argues that recreational players are also unbalanced when 4-betting (they rarely fold AK, K, Q to a jam). This strategy is different against pros.

IV. Pre-Flop Adjustments Against Pros

* **Default vs. Pro Opens (with Fish Present):** "Quite a lot of calling" to "let fish in the pot."
* **Three-Betting vs. Pro (with Fish Present):** To avoid being exploited, don't just call or 3-bet only premiums. Instead, "three betting a polarized range."
* **EP vs. EP Pro (with Fish):** Top of range (KK+, AKs+) and bottom of continuing range (worst suited Aces like A5s, worst suited Kings like KJs, worst suited Jacks/Queens).
* **Button vs. CO Pro (with Fish):** Wider. Top of range (JJ+, AK+, AQs+) and bottom of range (worst suited Aces like A2s, A6s, some worst suited 9x, direct suited connectors). "A lot of flatting" remains the general approach to involve fish.
* **No Fish Behind (Pro opens, two Pros in blinds):** "Table change" recommended. If not possible, "not be playing a polarized range," but rather "a linear three bet or fold strategy."

V. Seven Pre-Flop Red Flags (When to be Cautious)

These indicate an extremely strong hand from a recreational player, often Aces. "Hear those ambulance sirens coming in the distance" signifies the severity.

1. **Recreational Player Five-Bets:** "Usually Aces but sometimes also to be fair it could also be Aces." This is a scenario where one "may fold pocket kings."
2. **Recreational Player Four-Bets to >1/3 Stack Size:** Committing themselves pre-flop with a large 4-bet (e.g., 350 into 800 effective). "Usually they have Aces but once in a blue moon... they also have Aces."
3. **Recreational Player Cold Four-Bets:** When an opener and 3-bettor are in front, and a recreational player cold 4-bets, they often "just cold call" with hands like JJ, TT, 99, AK, so a 4-bet means "they just have Aces and Kings maybe sometimes Ace King suited or Queens." Be "very very very very cautious."
4. **Big Blind (Closing Action) Recreational Player Three-Bets vs. EP Open:** This signifies "very very strong hands" and is "massively under bluffed," as players often just call with speculative hands from the big blind. Not as strong a red flag as #1-3, but still calls for "proceed very cautiously" and "continuing very very tight."
5. **Large or Abnormal Open Size (by Recreational Player):** If a recreational player opens to an unusually large size (e.g., $40 when normally $20-25), they have "a very very strong range" that "is not folding to a three bet." Use this to your advantage with premiums (KK, AA) by "go[ing] big" (e.g., 5-6x 3-bet sizing).
6. **Recreational Player with Open Limping Range Opens From Up Front:** If they typically limp with pairs/suited Broadways/suited AX, then an open-raise means they have "strong pairs Ace King Ace Queen hands like that." Again, "going really really big" with KK/AA is advised as they won't fold.
7. **Recreational Player Limp-Raises Pre-Flop:** If they limp and then re-raise over your ISO. While not necessarily a fold for Kings, it's a "very precarious" situation calling for "proceed very very cautiously."