River Sizing Strategy in Live Poker: A Detailed Briefing

This briefing document summarizes key strategies for river betting in live poker, emphasizing the divergence of value and bluff sizing based on opponent's range and the "inverse" thinking process.

Main Themes and Key Concepts

The core principle discussed is that **River Bluff size and Value size should almost never be the same in live poker.** This counter-intuitive approach, while seemingly exploitable, is presented as the most profitable strategy against most live opponents, excluding elite professionals like Linus Love, Justin Bonomo, Stephen Chidwick, or Phil Hellmuth.

I. The Core Strategy: Inverse Sizing

The fundamental rule presented for river sizing is:

* "When my value wants to go big, my Bluffs want to go small."
* "When my value wants to go small, my Bluffs want to go big."

A more nuanced understanding reveals a third scenario:

* "When our Bluff size is medium, our value size is going to be either huge or tiny."
* "When our value wants to go medium, our Bluffs want to go either huge or very small."

II. Two Crucial Questions on Every River

To determine the optimal sizing, two questions are posed for every river situation:

1. **"What is my opponent's range?"**

* This involves a continuous process of narrowing down an opponent's possible hands from pre-flop to the river, similar to the game "Guess Who."
* "You don't start off by asking are you Bernard no you start off by asking is your person a man does your person have brown hair is your person wearing glasses same thing in poker you don't start off on the flap by going going oh I put you on nine of Hearts seven of clubs no you start off by thinking okay maybe my opponent has some top pair maybe they have some flush draws maybe they have some gut shots and you take that range and you carry it over to the next street and you continue to narrow it with each additional action."
* The ability to accurately assess and narrow an opponent's range is identified as a "biggest indicators... of which players are going to be able to make a lot of money from poker and those who aren't."

1. **"What would I do with the inverse?"**

* This involves mentally switching roles: if you have a strong value hand, consider what you would do if you were bluffing with a weak hand in the exact same spot, and vice-versa.
* This helps "distance the forest from the trees" and avoid emotional bias in decision-making.
* **Example:** If you have an overpair (value) and you determine that a bluff would go very small (because opponents would only fold weak draws, not strong top pairs), then your value hand should go very, very big. "if we were bluffing here maybe we would just go very small aha so that means when we have value we should be going really really big."

III. Flop and Turn Sizing Considerations

While the primary focus is on river sizing, the document briefly touches upon flop and turn strategy:

* **Flop & Turn: Value and Bluffs Often Share Goals:** On earlier streets, the goals for value hands and bluff hands are often aligned.
* "Our value hands obviously just want to build as big a pot as possible from worse and our Bluff hands want to build the largest pot possible on the Flop and the turn where we can still get them to fold the river so the goals with our value and our Bluff are often going to be exactly the same on the Flop and the turn and those goals only diverge on the river."
* "The best Bluff is the bluff they call the Flop Call the turn and then fold the river."
* **Turn Sizing: "Are they capped?"**This is the key question for turn sizing. If the opponent's range is "capped" (meaning their strongest hands are limited, e.g., they would have raised stronger hands on previous streets), then a larger bet size is generally preferred for both value and bluffs. "if yes I'm generally going to go pretty large with a lot of my range and if no I'm generally going to go pretty small."
* If their range is not capped (e.g., they could have strong draws or strong top pairs that would check-call), a smaller size is preferred to encourage them to continue with weaker holdings or to allow for profitable river bluffing opportunities.

IV. Illustrative Examples and Solver Analysis

The document provides several detailed examples to demonstrate the application of these principles, often contrasting the outcomes of different bet sizes with solver analysis.

**Example 1: Value Wants to Go Small, Bluff Wants to Go Big**

* **Scenario:** Holding Ace Queen of Spades (nuts) on a Jack-Nine-Deuce-Four (spade)-Three board where a flush draw completed on the turn. Opponent's range includes many top pairs (Jack-X) and bricked draws.
* **Inverse Thinking (Bluff with 76 diamonds):** A large bet ($220 into $160) is preferred for a bluff, as it gets many Jack-X hands to fold.
* **Value Play (Ace Queen):** Since the bluff wants to go big, the value hand (Ace Queen) wants to go small ($100). This encourages top pair hands to call, maximizing value from hands that would fold to a large bluff.
* **Solver Confirmation:** Solver strongly prefers the $100 bet for Ace Queen and the $220 bet for 76 of diamonds, confirming the inverse relationship.

**Example 2: Value Wants to Go Big, Bluff Wants to Go Small**

* **Scenario:** Holding Pocket Kings (nuts) in a 3-bet pot on a 9-4-2-King-Ace board. Opponent's range includes many weak single pairs (Queens, Jacks, 10s) and strong two-pair/sets (Ace-X, 9x, 4x, 2x).
* **Inverse Thinking (Bluff with 65 diamonds):** A very small bet ($150) is preferred for a bluff, as it gets a large portion of the opponent's weak single-pair range to fold (Queens, Jacks, 10s). A large bluff would run into too many strong hands that wouldn't fold.
* **Value Play (Pocket Kings):** Since the bluff wants to go small, the value hand (Pocket Kings) wants to go very big (Jam for $800). This targets the very strong hands (Ace-King, two-pair, sets) that are unlikely to fold regardless of bet size.
* **Solver Confirmation:** Solver strongly prefers jamming for Pocket Kings and the very small bet for 65 of diamonds.

**Example 3: Bluff is Medium, Value is Huge or Tiny**

* **Scenario:** Holding various hands on a Jack-Nine-Deuce-Four-Ace board. Opponent's range includes bricked draws, second/third pair (Jack-X), and top pair/two-pair (Ace-X, Ace-Jack).
* **Inverse Thinking (Bluff with 76 diamonds):** A medium size (60% pot) is preferred for a bluff, as it gets both bricked draws and some Jack-X hands to fold. A very small bluff is also an option, targeting only bricked draws. A huge bluff is less desirable as it runs into too many strong Ace-X hands.
* **Value Play (Pocket Nines - Nuts):** Pocket Nines prefers a "huge" size (Jam) to target Ace-Jack, Ace-Nine, Ace-Four, and Ace-Deuce, which are strong enough to call a large bet.
* **Value Play (Ace-Three of Spades - Thin Value/Top Pair):** Ace-Three prefers a "very very small" size (1/3 pot) to target weaker Jack-X hands, which would call a small bet but might fold to a medium bluff. This is the opposite of the bluff's preferred medium size.

**Example 4: Value is Medium, Bluff is Huge or Tiny**

* **Scenario:** Holding Pocket Kings or 76 of diamonds on a Jack-Nine-Deuce-Four-Three board. Opponent's range includes top pair (Ace-Jack, King-Jack, Queen-Jack) and bricked draws.
* **Inverse Thinking (Bluff with 76 diamonds):** Prefers either a "huge" size (All-in) to fold strong Jack-X hands (player dependent) or a "very very small" size (1/3 pot) to fold only bricked draws. The middling size is least preferred as it doesn't accomplish much.
* **Value Play (Pocket Kings):** Prefers a "middling" size ($500) to maximize value against Jack-X hands, as these hands are likely to call a medium bet.

Conclusion and Applicability

The document stresses that the specific numerical bet sizes or opponent calling frequencies are less important than the **methodology itself.** The core value lies in:

1. **Accurately assigning an opponent's range on the river.**
2. **Asking how they would respond to various bet sizes.**
3. **Utilizing the "inverse" question to inform your value and bluff sizing.**

"The point here isn't the calibration the point is the way of thinking... These guiding sets of questions are going to help you to the right answers no matter what players you are playing against." This strategy aims to "perfect your River sizing with both your value and your Bluffs" in live poker.