Top of Form

Advanced Poker Bet Sizing: A Comprehensive Study Guide

I. Flop Sizing

A. When Opponents Will Fast Play

* **Definition:** Boards that are wet (many draws) and dynamic (nuts likely to change on turn). Opponents are inclined to raise strong hands and call with weak hands.
* **Goal:** Choose the **biggest size** where opponents will raise their strong hands and call with their weak hands. This applies to both value bets and bluffs.
* **Rationale for Value Bets:**Maximize extraction from strong hands (e.g., opponent with 98s or pocket 3s on 983 flop).
* Keep weaker hands in the pot (e.g., Ace-3, Pocket 6s) that are drawing thinly or are already dead.
* Small bets allow opponents to continue with weak hands that might hold up later, making bluffs more profitable.
* **Rationale for Bluffs:** By choosing a size that encourages fast-playing of strong hands, bluffs can easily fold to a raise, while weaker calls set up profitable river bluffs.
* **Multi-way Pots:Caveat:** The more multi-way, the less likely opponents are to raise off strong hands, especially if they are next to act (trapping).
* **Pot Size Influence:** Larger absolute pot size means a smaller relative bet size is needed to incentivize strong raises and weak calls.
* **Example:** Half-pot in heads-up, but one-third pot or smaller in a 5-way pot.
* **Three-Bet Pots:Absolute vs. Relative Size:** Live players often consider absolute bet size more than relative (e.g., $600 bet is big regardless of pot size).
* **Sizing Down:** May need to size down to default one-third pot in a three-bet pot heads-up in position to encourage fast-playing and calls.

B. When Opponents Won't Fast Play

* **Definition:** Boards that are dry (few draws) and static (nuts unlikely to change on turn). Opponents are more likely to trap with strong hands and not call with weak hands.
* **Goal:** Split sizing strategies for value bets and bluffs.
* **Value Bets:Strategy:** Go with a **very big (overbet) size**.
* **Rationale:** Opponents won't fold strong hands anyway (e.g., Ace-10 or Ace-4 suited on A72 flop) and won't be enticed to call weak hands with a small bet. Aim to play for stacks against strong holdings.
* **"Big" Rule of Thumb:** Choose the biggest size that the bottom 10% of the top of their range will call (e.g., weak top pair like Ace-3, Ace-4, Ace-5, Ace-6 suited on A72 flop).
* **Bluffs:Strategy:** Mostly **check back**.
* **Rationale:** If opponents won't fast-play or call with weak hands, a small bet is not high EV. Checking allows for gaining more information on turns and rivers, potentially leading to profitable bluffs when opponents cap their range. Avoid bluffing into uncapped ranges on later streets.

II. Turn Sizing

A. When Opponents Will Fast Play

* **Context:** Board remains wet and dynamic, or a strong draw completes. Opponents are still inclined to raise strong hands and call with weak hands.
* **Goal:** Choose the **biggest size** where opponents will raise their strong stuff and call with their weak stuff (same as flop). This applies to both value bets and bluffs.
* **Rationale:** Even strong hands (flushes, straights) will fast-play if the bet is small enough to avoid bad runouts (four-flush, paired board). For bluffs, this allows easy folds to raises and sets up profitable river bluffs against capped ranges.
* **Pot Size Influence:** The bigger the absolute pot size, the smaller the relative bet size (e.g., quarter pot to 30% pot in a 3x pot).

B. When Opponents Won't Fast Play and Are Capped

* **Context:** Opponent's range is relatively capped (e.g., strong hands would have raised on previous streets). They won't necessarily fast-play, but their range of strong hands is limited.
* **Goal:** Choose a **big size** with both bluffs and value bets.
* **Rationale:** Target the bottom 10% of the top of their range. Opponents have a limited number of strong hands, but many weak/drawing hands that will call a big bet on the turn, but then be forced to fold on the river.

C. When Opponents Won't Fast Play and Are Uncapped

* **Context:** Opponent's range includes strong, uncapped hands (e.g., flushes or full houses in a three-bet pot where they fear Ace-King), and they are unlikely to fast-play them.
* **Goal:** Value bets and bluffs **split** sizing.
* **Value Bets:Strategy:** Go **big**.
* **Rationale:** Opponents are not going to put in more money for you anyway. Aim to extract maximum value from strong but unwilling-to-raise hands.
* **"Big" Guideline:** Bottom 10% of the top of their range calls.
* **Bluffs:Strategy:** Mostly **check**.
* **Rationale:** No way to force opponents to cap their range if they won't fast-play. Checking gains information, and allows for profitable river bluffs if the opponent checks and caps their range.

III. River Sizing

A. Core Four Scenarios (90% of the Time)

1. **Bluff Wants Big, Value Wants Small:**

* **Context:** Opponent is relatively capped (e.g., didn't raise earlier streets, and draws got there).
* **Bluff Strategy:** Go **very big** (e.g., size to get top-pair-like hands to fold). Get credit for completed draws.
* **Value Strategy:** Go **relatively small**. Target weaker top pairs and strong draws that called earlier streets but are now downgraded.

1. **Bluff Wants Small, Value Wants Big:**

* **Context:** Opponent has many weak hands that fold to any pressure, but also strong hands that won't fold to any size (e.g., two pair, nut straights).
* **Bluff Strategy:** Choose an **efficient small size**. Get weaker hands (e.g., Pocket 10s, Jacks, Queens, 9x) to fold.
* **Value Strategy:** **Empty the clip** (go very big/all-in). Maximize extraction from strong hands that are not folding anyway.

B. Exceptions (Less Common)

1. **Value Wants Medium, Bluff Wants Small or Big:**

* **Context:** Value hand wants to be called by strong-but-not-nut hands (e.g., top pair), so it chooses an in-between size.
* **Value Strategy:** Go **medium**. Aim for a size that gets strong top pair to call, but not so big that it scares them off.
* **Bluff Strategy:Small:** Efficiently fold out weak-but-losing hands (e.g., single pairs or draws that bricked).
* **Big (All-in):** If confident opponent will fold strong top pair under max pressure.

1. **Bluff Wants Medium, Value Wants Small or Big:**

* **Context:** Bluff targets hands that have been significantly downgraded but aren't pure air (e.g., Jack-X after an Ace comes on river).
* **Bluff Strategy:** Go **medium**. Efficiently fold out downgraded strong hands without risking too much against true strong hands.
* **Value Strategy:Small:** Get calls from weaker hands (e.g., Queen-Jack, King-Jack).
* **Big (All-in):** When opponent's range has many strong two pairs or sticky top pairs that won't fold to an all-in.

C. Diminishing Returns and Deep Stack Play

* **Concept:** At extremely deep stack sizes (e.g., 500BB+), there's a point where increasing bet size (e.g., from 2.5x pot to 6x pot) for value yields minimal additional folds but significantly increases risk for bluffs.
* **Nuts/Second Nuts (Value):** When very deep, the absolute nuts or second nuts can benefit from incredibly large (5x-7x pot) value bets. If the composition of calling hands doesn't change much between a 2.5x and 6x bet, the massive bet extracts maximum value from opponents who are calling regardless.
* **Bluffs:** For bluffs in deep-stacked scenarios, smaller or medium sizes might be more appropriate, or incredibly large if the opponent is proven to fold top pair under extreme pressure.

IV. General Principles and Shortcuts

* **Ask One or Two Simple Questions:** Drives bet sizing decisions.
* **Opponent's Tendencies:** Live players often let fear drive decisions. Absolute size matters more than relative size to many players.
* **Information Gathering:** Checking back bluffs on dry/static boards allows for more information on later streets.
* **Balancing:** While often discussed, balancing is not the primary concern. Exploiting opponent tendencies is more profitable.
* **Targeting:** With value bets, target the bottom 10% of the top of the opponent's range when they won't fast-play.

Quiz: Bet Sizing Fundamentals

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. On a wet and dynamic flop, why should you choose a large bet size for both value and bluffs?
2. In a multi-way pot, how does the number of players and the absolute pot size influence your flop bet sizing for value and bluffs?
3. When facing a dry and static flop, why is it recommended to use a very big (overbet) size for value bets?
4. On a dry and static flop, why should bluffs mostly check back instead of betting?
5. What is the "rule of thumb" for determining a "big" value bet size when opponents won't fast play?
6. Explain why, on the turn, bluffs should choose the same small size as value bets if opponents will still fast play strong hands.
7. If opponents won't fast play on the turn, but are relatively capped, what is the recommended bet sizing strategy for both value and bluffs?
8. Describe the river scenario where your bluff wants to go big, but your value bet wants to go small.
9. Describe the river scenario where your bluff wants to go small, but your value bet wants to go big.
10. In very deep-stacked poker, why might a 5x or 6x pot-sized bet be the best value bet with the nuts, even if it seems excessive?

Quiz Answer Key

1. On a wet and dynamic flop, choosing a large bet size encourages opponents to fast play their strong hands by raising, while also enticing them to call with weaker hands that are drawing thinly or dead. This maximizes value extraction and sets up future bluffs by keeping weaker hands in the pot.
2. In multi-way pots, you generally need to choose a smaller relative bet size. This is because opponents are less likely to raise strong hands (due to more players behind them) and the larger absolute pot size makes them less willing to call large bets with weaker holdings.
3. On a dry and static flop, a very big (overbet) size for value bets is recommended because opponents are unlikely to fold their strong hands regardless of size, and they won't call with weak hands anyway. This strategy aims to maximize extraction from strong holdings, playing for stacks.
4. On a dry and static flop, bluffs should mostly check back because opponents are unlikely to fast-play their strong hands or call with weak ones. Betting in this situation has low expected value, and checking allows you to gather more information and potentially find more profitable bluffing opportunities later.
5. The rule of thumb for a "big" value bet size when opponents won't fast play is to choose the biggest size that the bottom 10% of the top of their range will call. This means targeting their weaker strong hands (e.g., weak top pair) to ensure they continue in the pot.
6. On the turn, if opponents will still fast play strong hands, bluffs should choose a small size to allow opponents with very strong hands (like flushes or straights) to raise, letting the bluff off the hook easily. If they call, it means they have a weaker, somewhat capped range, setting up profitable river bluffs.
7. If opponents won't fast play on the turn but are relatively capped (meaning their strongest hands would have likely raised earlier), both value and bluffs should choose a big size. This strategy targets the bottom 10% of the top of their range, extracting value from hands that will call but are unlikely to improve significantly.
8. In this river scenario, the opponent is relatively capped because they haven't fast-played earlier streets despite opportunities. The bluff wants to go very big because it can get credit for completed draws and force folds from hands like top pair. The value bet goes relatively small to get calls from weaker top pairs and strong draws that are now downgraded.
9. This river scenario occurs when the opponent has many weak hands that will fold to any pressure, but also strong hands that will call any bet size. The bluff chooses a small, efficient size to fold out the weak hands. The value bet, however, goes very big (emptying the clip) to extract maximum value from strong hands that are not folding anyway.
10. In very deep-stacked poker, a 5x or 6x pot-sized bet can be the best value bet with the nuts because the composition of what calls and what folds may not change significantly between a 2.5x and a 6x bet. If opponents are already willing to call a large bet with strong hands, going even bigger extracts more money without facing much additional risk or losing significant call frequency.

Essay Questions

1. Compare and contrast the bet sizing strategies for flops when opponents are likely to fast play versus when they are unlikely to fast play. Discuss the underlying rationale for each approach and how it influences the goals for both value bets and bluffs.
2. Analyze the concept of "capping" an opponent's range and its implications for turn bet sizing. Provide examples of when an opponent's range is capped versus uncapped on the turn, and explain how this distinction dictates whether value and bluff sizings should match or diverge.
3. The source material suggests that "live players let fear drive their decisions" and that "absolute size is going to influence their decision a lot more than relative size." Discuss how these observations about human tendencies in live poker influence the recommended bet sizing strategies across different streets.
4. Elaborate on the four core scenarios for river bet sizing (Bluff Big/Value Small, Bluff Small/Value Big, Value Medium/Bluff Small or Big, Bluff Medium/Value Small or Big). For each scenario, describe the typical opponent's range composition and the strategic goals for both bluffs and value bets.
5. Discuss the advanced concept of "diminishing returns" in deep-stacked river play. Explain why choosing an "egregious" 5x or 6x pot-sized bet might be the most profitable value play with the nuts or second nuts, even if it seems counterintuitive, and what conditions must be present for this strategy to be optimal.

Glossary of Key Terms

* **Absolute Size:** The monetary amount of a bet, regardless of its relation to the pot size.
* **Backdoor (draw):** A draw that requires both the turn and river cards to complete (e.g., a backdoor flush draw).
* **Balance / Stay Balanced:** In poker, attempting to make one's betting range include a mixture of strong value hands and bluffs in similar spots, so opponents cannot easily exploit predictable patterns. The source argues this is often misunderstood and not the primary goal for live players.
* **Bottom 10% of the Top of Their Range:** A specific way to describe targeting the weaker portion of an opponent's strong hands (e.g., weaker top pairs, lowest sets or two pairs) to ensure they still call a large bet.
* **Capped / Uncapped Range:Capped:** An opponent's range of hands is limited to a certain strength, implying they would have likely raised stronger hands on previous streets.
* **Uncapped:** An opponent's range still includes very strong hands (e.g., the nuts or near-nuts) that they have not yet revealed or raised with.
* **Check Back:** To check when it's your turn to act, after an opponent has also checked, typically when out of position or after the action has checked to you.
* **Cooler:** A situation in poker where one player has a very strong hand, but another player has an even stronger hand, leading to a large loss for the former. The "nuts" coolering a strong but non-nut hand.
* **Counterfeit (a hand):** When cards on the board reduce the value of a player's hand, often by pairing up a card they already have, making their two pair or set less valuable.
* **Diminishing Returns:** A principle where, beyond a certain point, increasing effort (e.g., bet size) yields progressively smaller or no additional benefits.
* **Dry Board:** A board with few or no obvious drawing possibilities (e.g., flush draws, straight draws).
* **Dynamic Board:** A board where the nuts (the best possible hand) are likely to change on future streets (turn or river) due to many draws or potential for new strong hands to develop.
* **Empty the Clip:** To bet aggressively with very large sizes, often culminating in an all-in bet on the river, implying you are using all your remaining ammunition.
* **EV (Expected Value):** In poker, the average outcome of a decision over the long run, measured in chips or money. A "high EV play" is one that is profitable on average.
* **Fast Play:** To play a strong hand aggressively (betting and raising) to build the pot quickly, rather than slow-playing.
* **Flowchart:** A diagram illustrating a sequence of operations or decisions, often used in poker to outline bet sizing strategies.
* **Fold Equity:** The portion of the pot you expect to win by getting your opponent to fold their hand, rather than by having the best hand at showdown.
* **GTO (Game Theory Optimal):** A strategy in poker that is theoretically unexploitable, where no opponent can gain an advantage by deviating from their own optimal strategy. The source notes they are not playing GTO against humans.
* **Gutshot (Straight Draw):** A straight draw where only one specific card can complete the straight, typically in the middle of four cards (e.g., having 5-6-8-9 needs a 7).
* **Heads-Up Pot:** A poker pot contested by only two players.
* **Iso (Isolating Raise):** A raise designed to isolate one player (often a limper) to play heads-up against them, preventing other players from entering the pot cheaply.
* **Live Players:** Players playing poker in a physical casino or card room, as opposed to online. The source material focuses on tendencies of live players.
* **Medium Size:** A bet size that is neither very small nor very large, often somewhere in the range of 50-75% of the pot.
* **Middle Set:** Having a set (three of a kind) where the rank of the set is in the middle of the three board cards (e.g., pocket 8s on a 9-8-3 flop).
* **Multi-way Pot:** A poker pot contested by three or more players.
* **Nuts / Second Nuts:Nuts:** The best possible poker hand at a given moment.
* **Second Nuts:** The second best possible poker hand at a given moment.
* **Overbet:** A bet size that is larger than the current pot size (e.g., betting $150 into a $100 pot).
* **Pre-flop Razer:** The player who made the last raise before the flop was dealt.
* **Relative Size:** A bet size expressed as a proportion of the pot (e.g., half-pot, 3/4 pot).
* **River Sizing Trick:** A specific, often underutilized, strategy for bet sizing on the river.
* **Showdown Value:** The likelihood that a hand will win at showdown if no more betting occurs.
* **Single Raise Pot:** A pot where there has only been one raise (typically the open-raise) before the flop, without a 3-bet.
* **Solver:** Software used to compute GTO (Game Theory Optimal) strategies in poker.
* **SPR (Stack-to-Pot Ratio):** The ratio of a player's effective stack size to the current pot size. A low SPR suggests less room for multi-street play.
* **Static Board:** A board where the nuts are unlikely to change on future streets.
* **Sticky:** A term describing a player who is reluctant to fold their hand, even when facing significant pressure.
* **Straight Draw:** Having four cards in sequence that, with one more specific card, would complete a straight.
* **Target their strong stuff:** To choose a bet size that is specifically designed to get calls or raises from the stronger portion of an opponent's range.
* **Toy Game:** A simplified poker scenario used for theoretical analysis or to test strategies in a solver, often with reduced complexity to isolate specific concepts.
* **Trap (a hand):** To slow-play a strong hand by checking or making small bets, hoping to induce a larger bet or raise from an opponent.
* **Three-Bet Pot:** A pot where there has been a re-raise before the flop (e.g., an open-raise, followed by a 3-bet).
* **Uncapped Range:** See "Capped / Uncapped Range."
* **Value Bet:** A bet made with a strong hand, expecting to be called by a worse hand.
* **Wet Board:** A board with many drawing possibilities (e.g., multiple flush draws, straight draws).

Bottom of Form