Strategic Small Bets in Poker: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. **When is a small three-bet pre-flop recommended against a "fish" opponent, and why is it effective in shutting out "rags"?** A small three-bet pre-flop is recommended against a "fish" when "rags" (tight-aggressive players) are behind you. This is effective because "rags" typically play a 4-bet or fold strategy and are less likely to cold call, allowing you to isolate the "fish" for a heads-up, in-position pot.
2. **How can a player balance their small three-bet range with strong hands (like Aces and Kings) and marginal hands to prevent exploitation by "rags"?** To prevent exploitation, strong hands like Aces, Kings, and Ace-King suited can be included in the small three-bet range. This makes it difficult for "rags" to accurately determine if the small bet is for value or isolation, thus deterring their cold 4-betting.
3. **Explain the rationale behind using a very small c-bet (10-12% pot) on an Ace-high board in a 4-bet pot with Pocket Aces.** The rationale is to string along hands like Kings, Queens, or Jacks that might otherwise fold to a larger bet, maximizing value from these one-pair hands. If the opponent has an Ace, they are likely to stack regardless of bet size.
4. **After a small c-bet on an Ace-high board in a 4-bet pot with Aces, why is checking the entire range on the turn recommended?** Checking the turn allows opponents with Ace-X hands to bet into you, maximizing value. For hands like Kings or Queens, a check allows them a free card in hopes they hit on the river, or prevents them from folding to a double barrel, creating more opportunities for value.
5. **In a 3-bet pot, why should the continuation bet size be smaller (e.g., 30-35% of the pot) compared to a single-raised pot (e.g., 50-60%)?** In a 3-bet pot, the absolute size of the pot is already larger. A smaller bet size encourages opponents to raise their strong hands and call with their weaker hands, achieving the goal of eliciting action without over-betting into an already large pot.
6. **When an opponent is "uncapped" on the turn, why is a small bet preferred, especially with strong but vulnerable hands like trips?** A small bet is preferred when an opponent is "uncapped" (meaning they can have many strong hands) because it encourages them to put in more money with their strong, vulnerable hands (like trips on a wet board) and also entices weaker draws and marginal hands to call, expanding the pot and increasing value.
7. **What does it mean for an opponent's range to be "elastic," and why should a small bet be used against such an opponent, particularly with bluffs?** An "elastic" range means the opponent is price-sensitive and more likely to fold to larger bets. A small bet is used with bluffs against an elastic range to entice the opponent to continue with weaker hands, carrying them to the river where a larger bluff can be more profitable.
8. **Describe a situation where a small river bluff is highly profitable, even with a five-high hand.** A small river bluff is highly profitable when the opponent's range on the river is weak and capped, consisting primarily of missed draws or very weak pairs that are instant check-folds. This often occurs when opponents call too wide pre-flop, fast-play strong hands on the flop, and call draws on the turn.
9. **When is betting small on the river for value recommended against an aggressive player, especially with a hand like Pocket Eights on a Queen-high board?** Against an aggressive player, a small river value bet with a hand like Pocket Eights (when holding trips) makes your hand look like thin value, potentially inducing the aggressive opponent to "spazz" (bluff-raise) with missed draws or weaker hands. This maximizes value beyond just a straight call.
10. **Explain why a player might choose a very small river bet with the nuts (e.g., a flopped nut flush) in a single-raised pot against most of the player pool.** In a single-raised pot, a very small river bet with the nuts can entice even somewhat passive players to call with weaker flushes or top pairs, thereby maximizing value. It's designed to be a "trap" to encourage more action than a larger bet might.

Essay Format Questions (No Answers)

1. Analyze the strategic trade-offs of using small three-bet sizes. Discuss how a player can balance value and deception, and how opponent types (fish vs. rags) influence this strategy.
2. Elaborate on the "check-raise entire range on the turn" strategy in a 4-bet pot after a small c-bet on an Ace-high board. Discuss the various hands that benefit from this line and the underlying poker principles it exploits.
3. Compare and contrast the reasons for using small bet sizes in a 3-bet pot for continuation betting versus a single-raised pot. How does the "absolute size of the pot" influence optimal bet sizing in these scenarios?
4. Discuss the concept of "elastic" versus "inelastic" opponent ranges. Explain how understanding these concepts dictates bet sizing decisions on the turn and river for both value bets and bluffs, providing specific examples from the text.
5. Critically evaluate the profitability of small river bluffs in different scenarios. When is it most effective, and what specific qualities of an opponent's range or play style make it a high-EV (expected value) play?

Glossary of Key Terms

* **Absolute Size of the Pot:** The total amount of money currently in the pot, as opposed to its size relative to the bet. This influences optimal bet sizing.
* **Ace-high Board:** A community board in poker where the highest card shown is an Ace.
* **Bet Sizing:** The amount of chips a player wagers in relation to the size of the pot or in absolute terms.
* **Bluff:** A bet made with a weak hand to induce opponents with stronger hands to fold.
* **C-bet (Continuation Bet):** A bet made on the flop by the player who was the pre-flop aggressor.
* **Capped Range:** An opponent's range of hands that does not include the strongest possible hands (e.g., no sets or straights) because they would have played them more aggressively earlier in the hand.
* **Check-Raise:** A play where a player first checks, then raises after an opponent bets.
* **Cold Call:** To call a bet when there has already been a bet and a raise (or a raise and a re-raise) in the same betting round.
* **Cold 4-bet:** To 4-bet (re-raise a 3-bet) when not having previously put money into the pot in that betting round.
* **Elastic Range:** An opponent's range that is sensitive to bet sizing; they are more likely to fold to larger bets and call smaller ones.
* **Fish:** A weak or inexperienced poker player who makes frequent mistakes.
* **Float:** To call a bet on one street with a weak hand or draw, with the intention of bluffing on a later street.
* **4-bet Pot:** A pot where there has been a four-bet (a re-raise of a three-bet) pre-flop.
* **Heads-up:** A situation in poker where only two players are involved in a hand.
* **In-position:** When a player acts after their opponent(s) in a betting round, giving them an information advantage.
* **Inelastic Range:** An opponent's range that is not sensitive to bet sizing; they will call or fold regardless of the bet size, often due to holding very strong or very weak hands.
* **Isolate:** To make a bet or raise with the goal of getting other players to fold, thereby playing against only one opponent.
* **Missed Draws:** Hands that were attempting to complete a straight or flush but failed to do so by the river.
* **Nuts (Nut Flush):** The best possible hand in a given situation; the highest possible flush.
* **Out of Position:** When a player acts before their opponent(s) in a betting round, putting them at an information disadvantage.
* **Pre-flop:** The first betting round in poker, occurring before any community cards are dealt.
* **Rags (or Nits):** Tight-aggressive poker players who play a very strong range and are less likely to cold call or make creative plays.
* **Range:** The set of all possible hands a player could hold in a given situation.
* **River:** The final community card dealt in poker, and the final betting round.
* **Sealed/Unsealed/Capped/Uncapped:** Terms describing the strength and potential of an opponent's hand range based on their prior actions. An "uncapped" range means they can still hold the strongest possible hands.
* **Single-raised Pot:** A pot where there has only been one raise pre-flop.
* **Slow Play:** To play a strong hand weakly (e.g., by checking or calling instead of betting or raising) to disguise its strength and induce more action from opponents.
* **SPR (Stack-to-Pot Ratio):** The ratio of a player's remaining stack size to the current size of the pot.
* **Stack:** A player's total amount of chips.
* **String Along:** To make a small bet to encourage an opponent with a weaker hand to continue playing, hoping to extract more value on later streets.
* **3-bet Pot:** A pot where there has been a three-bet (a re-raise of an initial raise) pre-flop.
* **Trips (Trips T-X):** Three of a kind, specifically when two of the cards are on the board and one is in the player's hand (e.g., holding a Ten when the board has two Tens).
* **Turn:** The fourth community card dealt in poker, and the third betting round.
* **Uncapped Range:** See "Capped Range."
* **Value Bet:** A bet made with a strong hand, expecting to be called by a weaker hand.
* **Wet Board:** A community board that presents many drawing possibilities for straights or flushes.