Live Poker: The Cbet Flop, Check-Back Turn, Bluff-Catch River Line

This briefing document summarizes a highly profitable poker strategy in live 2/5 No-Limit Hold'em, focusing on a specific line: "the Cbet Flop checkback turn Bluff catch river line." The strategy emphasizes exploiting common tendencies of live recreational players, particularly their fear and greed.

I. The Core Strategy: "Cbet Flop, Check-back Turn, Bluff-catch River"

This strategy is presented as "maybe the most profitable line in all of live poker." It's designed for situations where you 3-bet pre-flop, get called, and are in position on a wet, dynamic board.

**A. Pre-flop (3-betting):**

* The author advocates a "three better fold" strategy against recreational players.
* Flatting (just calling) pre-flop is reserved for situations against strong pros with fish behind, or when in the big blind closing the action.
* **Example Hand:** Hero (Ace-9) 3-bets from the button after a Cut-off open. Villain calls.

**B. Flop (Cbetting):**

* **Range Betting:** The key here is to "range bet in position" in any heads-up pot (3-bet or single-raised). This makes you "very very hard to play against."
* **Sizing:** In 3-bet pots, a smaller size (30-40% pot) is preferred. The goal is to choose a size where villains "raise off their strong shit and still call with their weak shit."
* **Example:** On a Jack-9-Deuce with two spades flop, hero bets 50 into 147 (approx. 34% pot). Villain calls.
* **Why it's Good:** Live players "call too much with their weak stuff and raise too much with their strong stuff," allowing you to play "very very profitably against them because they essentially play face up against range bets."

**C. Turn (Check-back):**

* **Showdown Value (SDV):** If your hand has "plenty of Showdown value" and is "too thin to bet for three streets," checking back is recommended.
* **Example:** On a Four of Hearts turn, with Ace-9, hero checks back.
* **Rationale:**Continuing to barrel with SDV often leads to being "value owned" by better hands (Jack-X, pocket 10s, overpairs).
* Checking back allows you to lose "zero more money to those hands" when they have strong hands (as they'll bet big on the river).
* It allows you to "win two streets versus all of their draws and all of their Bluffs" if they bet small/medium on the river, and "only losing one Street against their top pair or their over pairs or their traps on the Flop."
* **Air/Bluffs:** Conversely, if you have "hands that don't have showdown value" (air, draws), you **should continue barreling** on the turn. Live players often get to the turn with a "too weak and too capped" range after calling the flop.

**D. River (Bluff Catch/Value Bet):**

* The river is where the strategy significantly diverges based on villain's action. The "innocuous three of clubs" is the example river card.

II. River Scenarios and Exploitative Adjustments

The strategy outlines three main river scenarios based on villain's action:

**A. Villain Bets Half Pot (or 40-60% pot):**

* **Default Action:** "We just essentially call with our entire range."
* **Why it's Profitable:**Live players "call too much" pre-flop and "call too much of their weak stuff on the Flop."
* They "raise off too much of their strong stuff on the Flop," meaning they have "too much air" and "too many draws that bricked" by the river.
* "Fear and greed drives Live players decisions." When they have strong hands, they tend to use a bigger size.
* When they bet half pot, they are "over bluffing," making "every single Bluff catcher more profitable as a call than as a fold."
* **Node-Locking Analysis:** The author demonstrates that by adjusting villain's flop play (less aggressive with draws, more aggressive with sets/two pair) and river play (strong hands bet big, bluffs bet small), the profitability of calling with Ace-9 increases significantly (from $233.48 in equilibrium to $320).
* **Crucial Insight:** "When they get here with a lot of their busted draws, when they get here with air, when they get here with nothing, they're just not going to be using the big size all the time. They're going to be much more weighted towards a small size."

**B. Villain Bets Full Pot (or greater than 3/4 pot):**

* **Default Action:** "We just essentially fold our entire range."
* **Why it's Profitable:**Live players are "massively under bluffing" when they choose large river bet sizes.
* "The larger the size you're betting the more Bluffs you need to have and I would argue that it's actually the opposite for Live players."
* "If someone is under bluffing every Bluff catcher is more profitable as a fold than as a call."
* **Node-Locking Analysis:** While Ace-9 might be marginally profitable to call in equilibrium ($15), in a "node-lock solution" reflecting live player tendencies, Ace-9 is a losing call (-$32), leading to folding 84% of the time.
* **Quote:** Guth and Jacobs (co-founder of Hungry Horse poker, high stakes online crusher) stated "if he just folded every single time a recreational player bet greater than 3/4 pot on the river he would have so so so much more money today."

**C. Villain Checks the River:**

* **Default Action:** "We just get to Value bet quite thinly on this River."
* **Why it's Profitable:** "We know in general if they had top pair if they had an over pair if they had a set they would just most likely come out and bet the river so now we just get the value bet with impunity."
* **Sizing:** A 2/3 pot size bet is suggested.
* **Node-Locking Analysis:** Betting 2/3 pot with Ace-9 becomes even more profitable (from $215 to nearly $259) when villain's calling range is adjusted to be less aggressive with hands like pocket fives (not raising) and calling more with top/second pair.

III. Common Mistakes to Avoid

The author highlights five common mistakes players make in this spot:

1. **Checking back the Flop with Showdown Value:** This complicates your strategy. A "simplified strategy executed well is almost always going to outperform a more complex strategy." All value hands, air, and draws want to bet when deep and in position in a 3-bet pot, making a range bet ideal.
2. **Continuing to bet on the Turn when they have a Showdown Value hand:** This is "monkey betting and barreling" without regard for hand strength. "Take a step back and actually classify your hand strength." Checking back SDV is more profitable.
3. **Checking back the Turn with hands that don't have Showdown Value (Air/Bluffs):** If you have air or draws, "continue barreling all the time" to make villain play for all their money when their range is weak and capped.
4. **Calling the River whenever they Bet Pot:** As discussed, live players "massively under bluffing" when choosing large river sizes, making folds more profitable.
5. **Folding whenever they Bet Half Pot (or 40-60% pot):** Since you should only be getting to the river with SDV hands (all air/draws having barreled on the turn), and live players are "over bluffing" small sizes, you should be "calling nearly 100%."

IV. Key Takeaways and Principles

* **Exploit Live Player Tendencies:** The entire strategy is built on exploiting live players' tendencies to:
* Call too wide pre-flop and with too much weak stuff on the flop.
* Raise too much strong stuff on the flop.
* Be driven by "fear and greed" on the river.
* Under-bluff large river bets.
* Over-bluff small river bets.
* **Simplify Your Flop Strategy:** Range-betting the flop in position is crucial and exploits live players who "play face up against range bets."
* **Classify Hand Strength on the Turn:** Distinguish between showdown value hands (check back) and air/bluffs (continue barreling).
* **Adjust River Calling/Folding Based on Bet Size:** This is the most crucial adjustment. Small bets are bluffy (call), large bets are value-heavy (fold).
* **Value Bet Thin on River Checks:** When villain checks, assume weakness and bet your showdown value for profit.

By implementing this "Cbet Flop, check-back turn, bluff-catch river line," players can significantly increase their win rate in live poker by exploiting common recreational player errors.