

CRUSHING THE MICROSTAKES

**The Definitive Guide
From the #1
Winner of All Time**



Nathan Williams
www.blackrain79.com

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#1 Winner of All Time**

By

Nathan Williams

Crushing The Microstakes

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About the Author

My name is Nathan Williams but I am better known online as “BlackRain79.” I have been playing online poker for around 5 years but my popularity skyrocketed about 2 years ago with the rise of a well known cash game tracking website. I have had a lot of success over the years. In fact, I very likely have the most winnings with the highest winrates in the history of online poker at the smallest stakes. These are my results before rakeback (add 20k more). ***Please note that winrates are in BB/100 (big bets). Double them for bb/100 (big blinds).***

Game Type Description	Game	Hands	BB/100	Winnings
\$5/10 NL	holdem	99	-26.33	-\$521.25
\$3/6 NL	holdem	1	441.67	\$53.00
\$2/4 NL	holdem	3111	-11.24	-\$2797.25
\$1/2 NL	holdem	27236	4.91	\$5350.35
\$0.5/1 NL	holdem	120085	2.56	\$6141.80
\$0.5/1 PL	holdem	242	8.11	\$39.25
\$0.25/0.5 NL	holdem	207759	1.43	\$2965.70
\$0.25/0.5 PL	holdem	8384	-2.96	-\$248.05
\$0.1/0.25 NL	holdem	749157	1.35	\$5052.13
\$0.1/0.25 PL	holdem	94036	2.37	\$1116.39
\$0.05/0.1 NL	holdem	91640	5.38	\$986.71
\$0.02/0.05 NL	holdem	1808087	7.22	\$13055.30
\$0.01/0.02 NL	holdem	2256588	14.57	\$13147.45
		5366425	9.01	\$44341.53

I grew up in Vancouver, B.C., Canada. I have played sports all my life and my goal was to become a professional athlete. However, as is often the case, that plan didn't quite work out. After getting my university degree (History/Philosophy 2003) I was nearing my mid 20's and had no real direction in life. Getting the usual 9-5 office job seemed horribly unattractive and boring to me. I wanted something a little more fast paced and competitive.

At a Halloween party in 2004 a friend of mine taught us all how to play this new popular game called "Texas Hold'em." We each put in 5 bucks and I luckboxed the win of course. I had never really gambled on anything in my life but this game seemed interesting and exciting to me. And if nothing else, maybe I could make a little extra money playing it.

The very next day I found Partypoker on the internet and I started playing for play money. I began to win immediately. I realized that all I had to do was play tight and wait for a good hand. Shortly thereafter I switched over to Pokerstars and did the same thing, building a huge play money empire. But this was all just for fun to me. I didn't really ever think about actually playing for real money.

Maybe I didn't trust it. I'm not sure. I think it was more perhaps that none of this really seemed real to me. This was on the internet after all. Could somebody really make decent money playing poker on the internet? Surely there must be some catch.

But then one day I found out that some people were actually willing to buy play money in exchange for real money. I had many millions of play chips sitting around doing nothing for me on Pokerstars. I promptly sold them all for \$60. Now I felt like I was freerolling so I had no problem playing for real money. Being a nit at heart I started at the lowest stakes and just employed my "play tight" strategy. To my amazement it worked with real money too.

I got better over time and slowly worked my way up through the micros and quit my job in 2007 when I was regularly playing NL100. I would just log on and print money from time to time. I was really young and immature

and didn't respect it at all. The money was too easy. I was lazy and didn't really learn how to develop the work ethic needed to be an online professional until several years later.

As my bankroll dwindled from lack of play I became semi-famous for playing millions of hands at the micros. I also started coaching around this time and discovered my love for that. I have been through a lot in this game. And I have seen a lot. It's only been 5 years or so but it feels like several lifetimes. The only next logical step was to write a book about it.

Introduction

I decided to write this book for two reasons. Firstly, there are so many players out there struggling to maintain a decent winrate or even beat the micros these days. This is crazy to me. Although online poker has gotten quite a bit tougher in recent years (yes even at the smallest stakes) these games are still overflowing with fish and you should be printing money by playing them.

Secondly, there is a real lack of quality information out there for people trying to get better at these games. I am the only person to my knowledge, at one of the big well known training sites, that is consistently making videos covering NL10 and below. I am an instructor at www.dragthebar.com.

Furthermore, there are very few if any books out there that are written on these games. The ones that I could find are often written under the broad stroke of "small stakes poker." This can include limits all the way up to NL200.

Many strategies that are applicable at NL200 would be wrong or downright bad when applied to NL2 and vice versa. Also, the authors usually have very little experience in actually playing at the micros or even playing at all in some cases!

Poker forums are a little bit better than books for information on these stakes. But again, much of it is provided by people who either don't play at these limits or are losing players or beginners who probably shouldn't be offering advice in the first place.

I don't know about you but this whole situation sounds pretty ridiculous to me. And it is especially bad for the legions of struggling microstakes players out there trying to find their way in this game. I know this because my blog gets tons of traffic from these exact kinds of people. They come there because they have seen my winrates and they want to know what my "secret" is.

Well that is what this book is all about.

I won't claim to be the best poker player anywhere in the following pages. I won't even claim to be able to beat the mid stakes games today. Frankly, I'd probably get crushed at high stakes. But I can tell you one thing, I have the most experience and the highest winrates, of anyone on earth, at the micros. And I still play heavy volume to this day. That is the best reason that I can give anyone to read this book.

This is a no nonsense book. I am going to try as best as I can to show you how to emulate my results. That's it. No stories. No plot. No cute diagrams. Just results.

Furthermore, I am not much into the math side of the game beyond basic pot odds and such. Every time I see books or forum posts with pages upon pages of EV calculations and percentages, I cringe.

It is fantastic to know all this stuff if becoming a math professor is your aim. However, if you want to become good at poker I am going to let you in on a little secret. Most of the best poker players in the world don't care about any of these calculations. In fact, often they don't even know how to do them! They just play and win a lot. That is also my approach.

In sum, this book is about giving you a straight forward explanation on how to build a solid poker strategy and start crushing the micros. This book is about upping your winrate in these games, period. I want you to be able to pay for the cost of this book with your newfound poker winnings as soon as possible. And if you stole this book, may the doomswitch be with you.

One final note about this book is that I will be using quite a bit of poker “jargon” throughout it. While I will do my best to explain what each abbreviation or term means, I may not do a satisfactory job in every instance. In those cases please refer to the glossary at the end.

Why Play Poker?

I think that before I get started on anything related to poker strategy a question that needs to be asked is why should you play this game in the first place? It's not that I am trying to convince you to play poker. You wouldn't be reading this book without a pretty serious interest in it. I want to talk about why we play this game more in the rhetorical sense. That is, to remind us **why** we play. Because this underpins everything.

There are plenty of other games out there from chess, to video games, to board games and so on. I think one of the biggest reasons why people are drawn to poker over these other games is that it involves money. And if you get good enough, lots of it. There is a direct financial incentive to get good at poker whereas that isn't always the case with the other ones.

Now I don't think that money is the end of it though. It does largely make the world go round' and everybody could use some more of it. But there is also an excitement factor that intrigues people. Televised poker in particular, over the past 5 to 10 years, has really taken this game to new levels. There is a huge level of excitement in a massive all in pot with millions on the line that is just unmatched in almost any other sort of competition.

And this is no different for me. When I started playing poker I was immediately drawn to the challenge and excitement of the game. After all, I was playing for virtual chips which had no real value at all. My enthusiasm was definitely spurred on by watching WPT episodes and "Rounders" for the 14th time. I had an almost romantic connection with the game from the start. I was obsessed with it.

I think this story is pretty similar to a lot of other people's. However, anyone who gets involved with this game for any reasonable length of time soon learns that the reality of it is quite a bit different. While poker is definitely exciting at times and offers plenty of new and interesting challenges, it can also be quite boring, monotonous and sometimes highly frustrating. That is, if you want to be a winning poker player. Losing poker players always have fun. As I often say, winning poker is simply an exercise in pain tolerance much of the time.

Well I hope you haven't thrown this book in your trash bin yet after all that and are still with me. The truth is poker is a beautiful game as well. It is amazing on so many levels and has so many direct comparisons with events and situations in our lives. I have always thought that poker is really just a microcosm of life. Poker rewards things like hard work, level headed thinking under pressure, discipline, and risk management. These are all skills that will also take you very far in your other pursuits in life.

Variance

But it is important that we have a healthy and critical understanding of this game as well. I refer to this as kind of like knowing what you signed up for. I don't expect very many total beginners to be reading this book so I don't think I need to tell you that this game is full of ups and downs. And this won't end, **ever**. There is nobody who is good enough at this game to be able to overcome the downs and only have ups. "Variance," which is just a word that is used to describe these swings, is a constant and must be accepted by anyone who plays this game.

I'd like to be able to write some amazing, ground-breaking, insider look at variance after having played millions and millions of hands of poker. But I can't. All I can do is just be completely honest. I do not understand the short run in this game. I only understand the long run. In the long run I win. In the short run I have no idea what is going to happen. And I just have to accept that.

The Short Run

I should mention that by short run I mean anything under 100k hands. I know that this may sound like a huge number for someone who comes from a live background and may not even see this amount of hands in a year. Or for someone who only plays a couple hours a week online and doesn't do much multi-tableing. But unfortunately this is the way that it is. Winrates can be wildly off the mark with a sample size of less than this amount. The short run really isn't so short.

In those 5 million hands that I have played, I have had several stretches of close to 100k hands, and even a couple over that amount, where I ran significantly below expected value (EV). So far below that it would be easy to conclude that I was a losing poker player. On the flip side, I have had several runs of this length that would seem to indicate that I am a god among men at the poker tables. Obviously neither of these conclusions are true. And that is why it is so difficult to try and make sense of the short run.

Good or bad runs of this length won't happen very often at all. But they can and will happen to you eventually. I feel like I could write a whole book on short term variance alone. But thank god I won't! All I can tell you is that crazy stuff happens and sometimes for a long time in this game.

Sadly, there are a lot of potentially great poker players who worked hard but got unlucky for long stretches at the beginning of their careers and quit. On the flip side, there are scores of bad players who got lucky early on and either proceeded to give it all back and more, or got better and started winning. Whichever the case, they stuck around because of the positive reinforcement that they got from that early win.

But this is just the way it is in life in many areas, not just poker. The people who make it are usually hard workers and talented and all that. But they are usually the lucky ones as well. Think of the band who happened to be playing in front of that big record company executive, who happened to be very interested in signing some new talent, on that particular night. I could list other scenarios but you get the point.

The Long Run

But it isn't all doom and gloom. There is this whole idea of the long run which actually has a very happy ending. You already saw it before when I posted my results. **Poker is a game of skill. Period.**

Whereas the short run usually isn't worth paying much attention to, the long run is something that you can critically assess and have some realistic expectations about. Once you have played a couple hundred thousand hands of poker and you are showing a profit, you are a winning poker player (at least at those limits) and there is no denying that. As crazy as the short run can be at times, your time is worth money at the poker tables.

And this should be the end goal of course for anyone who takes this game seriously. While there are some great rakeback rewards that you can take advantage of these days, which allow breakeven or even slightly losing players to still show a profit in the long run, who wants that? I am a highly competitive person and I would much rather quit and find something else to do if I couldn't actually beat the games. I imagine that this is the case with a lot of the people reading this book as well.

The Micros

This is the place where everybody starts. Or at least they should. I think that everybody who is new to online poker should always start with these games even if they have years of experience at much higher limits. There are two reasons for this.

Firstly, if you come from a live poker background, online poker will be a little bit of a rude awakening at first. Put simply, the games are much tougher overall online.

Secondly, even though it is the same game that you are used to playing, there are some not so subtle differences between online and brick and mortar play. Probably the most important one is just the sheer speed of the online game. With everything automated, and with the ability to multi-table, hands get dealt much faster and the action moves along at a much quicker pace than you may be used to.

So even if you are a highly advanced player it is a good idea to spend at least a little bit of time playing these games if for no other reason than to get used to playing online. I am a big believer in taking your time with this game and doing things the right way.

The micros are the stakes that I am going to be primarily talking about in this book and specifically 1c/2c (NL2) and 2c/5c (NL5). It is obvious from my results above that these are the stakes where a lot of my experience lies. **I want to make it clear however that most of the strategies for NL5 will apply to higher limits as well. That is, I would play it the exact same way at NL10, NL25 and NL50.** I will be using “NL5” for brevity though. I don’t want anyone to think that this book is solely for total beginners. I will discuss this more in a bit though.

Most online poker rooms spread games at stakes this low these days. Some also offer a 2c/4c (NL4) game which plays fairly similar. However, for the purposes of this book, I will be referring to the two lowest stakes offered by the largest online card room in the world, [Pokerstars](#). Those are NL2 and NL5.

These stakes are unique in online poker because they offer you the chance to buyin for as little as 40bb (big blinds) and as much as 250bb. Although keep in mind that the max buyin in the Zoom games is 100bb with a 50bb minimum. This wide spectrum of buyins (at the regular tables) allows people to experience the full range of different play styles. At NL2 the most you can buyin for is \$5. And at NL5 it is \$12.50.

Since the amount of money at stake is so trivial to most people, you will find a large amount of casual players as well as out and out beginners at these limits. But don’t be fooled into thinking that it will be a cakewalk. This isn’t play money where nobody cares at all. Most people are trying to win and there are plenty of decent grinders trying to do the exact same thing as you; make money and move up!

So it is at these stakes where you will want to learn the right fundamentals from the beginning. Don't be fooled into thinking that you are too good for these limits and need to play some "real poker." I have seen far too many people get frustrated at the micros, move up too fast and get crushed. Remember we want to be the ones doing the crushing here!

Crushing the Micros

Before you move on to greener pastures it is imperative that you learn how to not only beat, but destroy the micros. If you can't beat up on some of the worst players in the world what makes you think that you are going to be successful against much more competent players at higher stakes?

It is crazy how some people think this. And it is also crazy how many people I see who are struggling to even beat the micros these days. This is where I come in. My intention with this book is to create a complete guide, from the playbook in my head, on how to utterly destroy these games.

I say the "playbook in my head" because that is exactly what it is to me. Although I have utilized poker forums, books and videos and been around the game for a long time, the play style that I use was largely developed through millions and millions of hands of trial and error. Most of this information is completely automatic in my brain now which is why I can 24-table these games quite easily and still sport some enormous winrates. My success or failure with this book will be determined by how well I can relay this information to you.

The Limits

But before I get into any specific strategy stuff I am going to have to talk about a bunch of different logistical items. Firstly, as mentioned this book will be mostly concerned with NL2 and NL5. Many people erroneously believe that these two games basically play the same. This couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, I would go so far as to say that the relative difference between these two limits is the largest that you will face at any point during your poker career.

NL2

NL2 is very unique but not just because it is the smallest amount of money that you can play no limit hold'em for on the internet. NL2 is different because it is the last bastion of completely insane play. This limit is filled with people who are just playing poker online for the first time, intoxicated lunatics shoving every hand and a whole host of other really bad players who are just begging you to take their money. Multiple huge fish can usually be found on every single table and almost every regular has significant leaks in their game.

I am still able to maintain a double digit **big bet** winrate in this game. There is no other game where this is even remotely possible today. NL2 is a circus. That is the best way to describe it.

NL5

At NL5 the play tightens up considerably. At this level you will find quite a bit less fish. And there will be many more dedicated regulars, some of whom are reasonably competent players. Since this is the second level of online poker, you generally won't find the total newbies or the ones just coming up from play money. But don't

get me wrong, the play is still very soft at this stake. It is just noticeably different when compared to NL2. At limits higher than NL5 you just get more of the same but the regulars become increasingly better. Fish are fish at any limit.

Two Very Different Games

Your winrate will decrease by quite a bit at NL5. My winrate at this stake is 5 BB/100. This is half of what my NL2 winrate is at 10 BB/100. This precipitous drop is the surest evidence of the difference between these two stakes. But again, this is mostly due to the sheer insanity that is NL2. Any level seems quite a bit more difficult when compared to it.

And for this reason, many of the concepts addressed in this book will be prefaced with the **NL2 approach** and the **NL5 approach**. As mentioned however much of the strategy advice offered for NL5 will be applicable at NL10, NL25 and so forth as well. On the flip side, the advice for NL2 is often specific to that limit only. Whereas I prefer fairly standard lines and strategies at NL5, I sometimes go way off the radar at NL2 in many regards.

A lot of people may scoff at some of the outlandish suggestions that I will be offering for NL2 in this book. Well firstly to that I would simply counter, they work. I am the #1 winner of all-time at that stake and I use them. In fact I have noticed countless NL2 regulars copying my strategies over the years. And as they say, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

But a better retort is this. Nathan, why learn a bunch of strategies that only apply to one limit especially when I won't be sticking around there for very long? Indeed, it seems comparable to learning some obscure tribal language. What's the point? Why not just study a common language that a lot of people speak? I will tell you why.

Many of the NL2 specific strategies that I will put forth in this book are based on logic. No I am not a philosopher or even a logician by any means. What I mean by this is that much of this game is deeply rooted in making solid decisions based off of the information that your opponents are giving you. In fact I think that is what interested me so much about this game in the first place.

I formulated many of my strategies as a direct response to the information that my opponents were giving me and the lines that they were commonly taking. One size does not fit all in poker. As I mentioned above, NL2 is a totally unique limit. Can you beat it by using the more “standard” approach that I will offer for NL5 and higher? Yes, absolutely. But will you crush it beyond belief and more importantly understand why you are having such success? No.

And like I said that is the heart of what this game is all about in my opinion; adapting to your opponents. That is why there are so few concrete rules about how to have success in poker. The best approach that you should take in any individual hand usually depends on so many different factors that are specific to that particular situation. There is often no one right way to play it.

And so while many of these NL2 ideas may seem tedious or downright silly to learn, I can promise you that this exercise will be useful to you beyond measure down the line. This is because it will teach you how to think about this game in the right way.

Poker is a game that is always changing, especially the online game. Being able to see through the way it currently plays, and develop counter strategies on the fly, is what is going to bring you the most success. This is one of the biggest reasons why the top players are where they are. They are always one step ahead of the game.

If you work reasonably hard at this game but simply do what everyone else is doing, you can still make plenty of money off the fish but you will probably wind up with a mediocre winrate at best. If you want to truly crush it, you will need to step off the well trodden path from time to time and create your own. This is one of the main ideas that I hope to instill in you in this book.

And if nothing else, these crazy ideas for NL2 will hopefully up your winrate while you are there and put some more money in your bankroll. Who doesn't want that?

Bankroll

I don't want to spend too much time on this topic as it is mostly an individual thing. But in general you should always have at least 20-30 buyins for these limits. This will allow you to mass multi-table if you want and still have a couple buyins left sitting around. Downswings are relatively minor in these games and will hopefully be even less of a concern for you after this book. One of the biggest benefits of a high winrate is the noticeable lack of large downswings.

Some people prefer to have a lot more than 30 buyins though and that is completely fine as well. And if you are only planning on playing a couple of tables at a time, then maybe you don't even need 20. Think about what size bankroll makes **you** feel comfortable and go from there.

Buyins

So previously I talked a little bit about the different buyin amounts at these stakes. What amount should you actually buyin for though? My answer for this is always the same. If you are new to the game or having trouble

beating either of these limits, then buyin for 100bb. That would be \$2 at NL2 and \$5 at NL5. At NL10 and higher 100bb is the maximum allowed (aside from the tables specifically marked “Deep”) so just buyin for that amount.

100bb is the classic online poker maximum buyin at every limit except NL2 and NL5 on Pokerstars. Most of the online poker literature and forum talk centers around this buyin.

The reason that I do not advocate buying in for anything less than 100bb is that it involves a whole host of different strategies that include higher variance and lower winrates. 100bb is the perfect stack size to fully utilize all four streets in no limit hold'em and maintain a high winrate.

For more advanced players and especially those that are already able to beat these games at a good clip, I would recommend buying in deep for 250bb. That would be \$5 at NL2 and \$12.50 at NL5.

Deep stacked poker brings a whole new level of decision making to the game as there is a lot more room to manoeuvre and put big pressure on your opponent. In general stack off ranges are tighter among decent players. But among fish they will stay the same. So playing deep stacked will allow you to attain the absolute highest winrate in the game.

I would especially advocate buying in deep if the table fish is deep as well. You could even just match his stack size. I will go into specifics later with regards to how to spot the fish and everything that goes along with table selection.

One final note on buyins is to make sure that you are using the auto reload feature that most online poker rooms offer. This will allow you to always have 100bb or more to start a hand, which is one less thing to concern yourself with. Embrace the automation.

Number of Tables

Again, this is going to depend upon your level of expertise. For beginner level players I would recommend playing no more than one or two tables for the first little while. As you get comfortable with this amount you should try adding one more table and see how you fare. **You should add tables until you find that sweet spot where you are playing as many as you can while still making solid poker decisions.**

This number is going to be different for everybody. And I don't want to age bash anyone here. I am a relative old timer in this game myself at 32. However, age may play a factor. Younger kids often have sharper minds and heck, all those years of playing video games must count for something right?

Don't worry about the amount of tables that you can play though. And don't try to play X number of tables because some hero grinder of yours plays that amount. As I said you need to find out what number is right for you and stick with that. Keep in mind that this number will probably increase over time anyways as your poker decisions become more automatic.

There are many software related tools that can help you become more efficient as well. This will save you time and allow you to play more tables at once. For an in depth discussion on how to set up and configure a bunch of free AHK scripts, I would recommend that you have a look at my "Definitive Guide to Multi-tabling" video series on [DragTheBar](#). And then check out [this thread](#) where I provide all the download locations and some additional setup details.

But for a lot of people a product called [Table Ninja](#) might be a better idea. I have switched over to it now. Table Ninja is a lot more user friendly and easier to setup than the AHK scripts. It is also continually updated so there are no headaches when a poker site decides to change its software. However it also comes with a price tag.

If you are only going to be playing a handful of tables then I probably wouldn't concern yourself with any of the above software tools. They are more intended for people who are going to be doing some heavier multi-tabling (at least 4 tables).

Table Layout

Regarding the layout of the tables on your screen, I recommend tiling them if you have a large monitor and only play a handful of tables. For me however, as a mass multi-tabler, I prefer to stack my tables. This requires less head and eye movement. Stacking also forces me to make my decision and move on because the table gets buried in the stack. Since this game is all about the long run this is a good general practice to have anyways.

A disadvantage of stacking however is the inability to keep an eye on all of your tables. But I am often so busy making decisions in other hands that I don't have much time to watch them anyways. However with Table Ninja or AHK scripts you can create hotkeys to move a table in and out of the stack if you wish. I often do this if I see a table that has a massive fish on it for instance. I will move that table off to the side in order to give it a little bit more of my attention.

Tracking Software

The only other piece of software that I recommend you use is [Holdem Manager](#) (HEM). HEM is a database program that compiles and analyzes raw hand history files and provides information on your play and that of others. It is an invaluable tool for studying and improving your own game. Also, you can display this information right on your poker tables with the heads up display (HUD) feature. The HUD alone will save you the cost of the entire program in no time. I will be referring to several HUD stats throughout this book.

HUD Setup

Having a good HUD setup will help you quickly identify a player type. This is really important especially if you plan on doing any amount of multi-tabling. In HEM you can configure your HUD by going,



Here are a couple of the main stats that I think you should have:

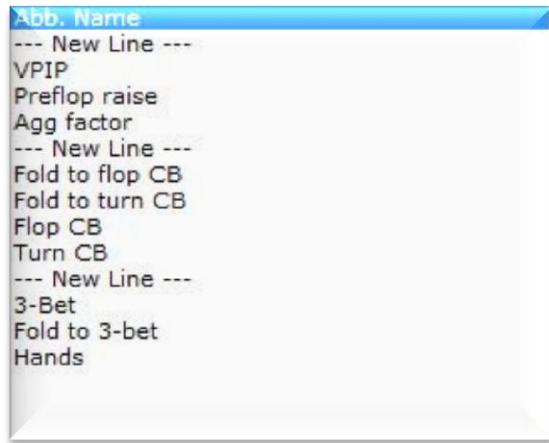
- Voluntarily Put Money in Pot (VPIP)
- Preflop Raise (PFR)
- Aggression Factor (AF)
- Number of Hands
- Cbet
- Fold to Cbet
- 3bet
- Fold to 3bet

I think that the above eight stats are really the main ones. Some people may use a few more such as attempt to steal, turn cbet, fold to turn cbet and even some river or 4bet stats. I use a few of these myself. But I would advise against cluttering your screen with too many stats that you will hardly ever use. If you need more information you can always bring up the full popup by left clicking on the player's name.

My HUD looks like this:



And this is what these numbers refer to in HEM.



Interpreting the Stats

One of the most important things to remember when using your HUD stats is to be aware of the sample size. I have seen people make this mistake time and time again and I have done it many times myself. Some stats require as little as 20 hands or so to be relatively reliable. Some need 100. Some need 500. Some need 1000. I will list some rough rules of thumb here on what kind of sample sizes I think you should be looking for with certain stats.

20+ Hands	100+ Hands	500+ Hands	1000+ Hands
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• VPIP• PFR	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AF• Fold to flop CB• Flop CB• 3bet• Fold to 3bet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fold to turn CB• Turn CB	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fold to river CB• River CB• 4bet• Fold to 4bet

As you can see some stats like VPIP and PFR come close to their true value over a relatively small sample size. However you should still have about 20 hands before you start making any judgements based off of them. Some other stats require a couple hundred hands. And the river and 4bet stats (which you will rarely use anyways) require such an enormous sample that I think it's a waste of space to even have them on your screen.

The reason why the sample size requirements vary so widely is pretty simple. With some stats such as VPIP, you (or someone else) has a chance to perform that action almost every hand. Whereas with a stat like river CB, how many times do you even go to the river in say a 100 hands? Not very many.

If you are ever in doubt regarding the relevance of a particular stat, it is a good idea to bring up the full popup and see if there is a number in brackets to the right of it. Here is an example.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes

Player Name	83 hands 292.17 BB/100									
Time	5m	10m	20m	session						
Won/lost	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0						
Pre-flop	Total	Flop	MP	CO	BTN	SB	BB			
VP\$IP	59% (83)	57% (23)	63% (19)	91% (11)	60% (10)	70% (10)	10% (10)			
Call Open	17% (23)	0% (4)	25% (4)	50% (2)	20% (5)	0% (4)	25% (4)			
Limp	71% (59)	68% (19)	67% (15)	89% (9)	100% (5)	100% (6)	0% (5)			
PFR	4% (83)	0% (23)	5% (19)	9% (11)	0% (10)	10% (10)	0% (10)			
Raise 1st	4% (45)	0% (19)	7% (14)	13% (8)	0% (3)	0% (1)	--			
3-Bet	4% (23)	0% (4)	0% (4)	0% (2)	0% (5)	25% (4)	0% (4)			
Fold to 3B	--	4-Bet	--							
Fold to 4B	--	4B range	--							
Steal (total)	CO	Btn	SB	Vs Steal		SB	BB			
8% (12)	13% (8)	0% (3)	0% (1)	Fold		100% (2)	--			
				Call		0% (2)	--			
				3Bet		0% (2)	--			
Post flop	Total	Flop	Turn	River	Showdowns					
Aggression	1.8	1.3	2.0	2.3	WTSD					
Agg Freq	29% (99)	16% (50)	40% (30)	47% (19)	WWSF					
Check-raise	0% (20)	0% (13)	0% (5)	0% (2)	W\$SD					
Vs missed CB					W\$SD(ex small)					
Bet In position	29% (14)	29% (14)	--	--	100% (7)					
Bet OOP	38% (13)	--	38% (13)	--						
Flop As PFR	Total	Regular	3-Bet pot	Turn						
Continuation bet	33% (3)	50% (2)	0% (1)	Continuation bet						
Fold CB to Raise	--	--	--	Fold to CB						
Fold to Donk Bet	--	--	--	0% (2)						
Raise Donk Bet	--	--	--							
Vs PFR				River						
Fold to CB	75% (8)	75% (8)	--	Cont bet						
Raise CB	0% (8)	0% (8)	--	Fold to CB						
Donk bet	0% (7)	--	--	0% (1)						
Steal limped pot	18% (11)									

In the above popup you can see that the number in brackets to the right of this player's VPIP is 83. This means that he has had 83 opportunities to VPIP. With a sample this big we can be very confident that the information here will be reliable.

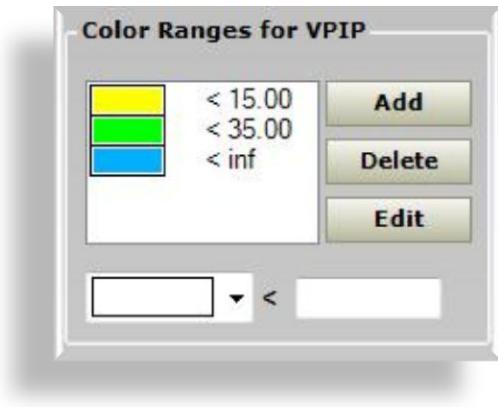
However, if you look at the number to the right of this player's river fold to CB, you can see that he has only had one opportunity. So the information that we have for that stat is going to be pretty much meaningless. In between those two extremes we can see that this player has had 8 chances to raise a CB. We can be reasonably confident that this player does not raise cbets very often.

The suggestions that I outlined above are just rough guidelines. I am definitely not any kind of stats expert. The main point here is that you need to constantly be aware of the sample size when using your HUD stats to make poker decisions. Bad information can be worse than no information at all. You don't want your HUD working against you!

Color Coding

One last thing with HUD stats is that you may want to consider using some color coding. This will make it easier for you to interpret the stats on the fly. Humans tend to be better at more quickly recognizing and giving meaning to a color as opposed to a number. I recommend using the street light colors. Red for stop, yellow for proceed with caution and green for go.

So with VPIP in full ring for instance you might want to set it so 0-15 is colored red, 16-35 is yellow and 36-100 is green. For 6max, perhaps 0-21 red, 22-40 yellow and 41-100 green. I have personally used some slightly different colors over the years so I just stick with those but you get the idea.



I don't want to spend too much more time on this topic though as a HUD setup is a pretty individual thing and I want to keep this book primarily about actual poker strategy. For a more in depth look at HUD setup please check out a pair of articles from my blog recently.

<http://www.blackrain79.com/2011/07/how-to-set-up-your-hud-part-1.html>

<http://www.blackrain79.com/2011/07/how-to-setup-your-hud-part-2.html>

Player Types

Before I talk about anything else I need to break down the different player types. And I want to add the disclaimer that since this book is about online poker at the lowest stakes, the player types listed below refer to the ones that you will find at those levels. At higher stakes players get quite a bit more aggressive and you will

encounter the loose and aggressive (LAG) player type a lot more often as well. There aren't nearly as many LAG's at the micros however so I decided not to include them.

As I mentioned before, adapting to your opponent is the heart of this game in my opinion. So almost every decision that you make at the poker table will be dependent on what kind of player you are up against. And as mentioned, this is why having a good HUD setup is so important. But luckily there are only a few different player types to remember. I generally lump players into three different categories with a couple sub units.



Nits

There are two different types of regulars (regs) that you will encounter at the micros, nits and tight and aggressive (TAGs). They can often be found playing several tables at once, are usually breakeven or winning players and play fairly tight overall.

Nits are on the tighter end of this scale. They will often have stats such as 10/8 in full ring (or 16/14 in 6max) with the 10 being the VPIP and the 8 being the PFR. They pretty much only play very good hands preflop and usually only get involved in big pots postflop with big hands.

They don't give away much easy money but they can also be exploited quite a bit due to their overly tight play. They also leave a fair amount of money on the table by choosing not to play some speculative hands. You should ruthlessly steal their blinds and cbet against them a lot.

I am going to outline the general tendencies of each player type according to the eight main HUD stats that I talked about before.

VPIP: Very low

PFR: Low

AF: Low

Number of Hands: n/a

Cbet: Average

Fold to Cbet: Very high

3bet: Low

Fold to 3bet: Average

Here is an example of what a nit in full ring might look like using my HUD setup.



TAGs

The other kind of reg is the TAG. TAGs are much more difficult to play against than nits. This is the optimal play style in my opinion for the micros or any level of poker for that matter. These players have more speculative hands in their range than nits and are willing to give a little more action postflop with non-nut hands. These kinds of players generally have stats like 15/12 in full ring (21/18 in 6max) and are winning players. I would simply try to avoid playing pots with them too often. They are usually the best players at the limit.

VPIP: Low

PFR: Average

AF: High

Number of Hands: n/a

Cbet: High

Fold to Cbet: High

3bet: High

Fold to 3bet: Average

A typical TAG in full ring might look like this on your HUD.



SLPs

Semi-loose passives are a fairly large group of players who don't take the game very seriously but aren't completely oblivious either. While they aren't splashing around in every single pot, they are playing more hands than is optimal. They are often weak or passive type players who call too much.

You should value bet frequently and with a fairly wide range against them. These types of players will often call with pretty meagre holdings and will call anything with a draw.

SLP's will often run stats that look something like 24/6 in full ring or 30/8 in 6max. While you can certainly make money off of them, they still aren't the main reason that you should be at the table. They are giving away far more money than TAGs and nits but they aren't giving it away by the wheelbarrow full either.

VPIP: Average

PFR: Low

AF: Low

Number of Hands: n/a

Cbet: Average

Fold to Cbet: Average

3bet: Low

Fold to 3bet: Low

A typical SLP might look like this on your HUD.



Fish

These types of players are the reason that we play poker. It is so vital to always keep this in mind. As a good exercise to remind myself of this I will often go back over my biggest winning hands from the past couple days and count how many of them involved this type of player. It is usually the vast majority.

These players play poker purely for entertainment or recreation. They play any hand that looks good to them. They are not trying to learn, play optimally or really even win.

They will sometimes deliver incredible bad beats which can easily put people on tilt. It is very important not to lash out at them when this happens. They are the lifeline of the poker industry and are responsible for a large chunk of your profits.

These types of players will play a very wide range of hands and often have stats like 55/4. They are usually very passive and you should value bet them relentlessly. They will make tiny min probing bets with their weak made hands and draws. You can either raise these or just call down with a hand as weak as ace high.

VPIP: High

PFR: Very low

AF: Very low

Number of Hands: n/a

Cbet: Average

Fold to Cbet: Low

3bet: Very low

Fold to 3bet: Low

A fish will look something like this on your HUD.



Maniacs

While 90% of fish are the passive type discussed above there is a small subset known as “maniacs.” This type of player is usually intoxicated in some way and is playing almost every hand in a very aggressive manner. These players are very high variance but are also insanely profitable to play against. They will routinely show up at the micros and it is a good idea to focus on that table and even play a bit longer than you had originally planned if they are still around and have money.

VPIP: Very high

PFR: Very High

AF: Very high

Number of Hands: n/a

Cbet: Very high

Fold to Cbet: Very low

3bet: Very high

Fold to 3bet: Very low

A Maniac will look something like this on your HUD.



Lobby Setup

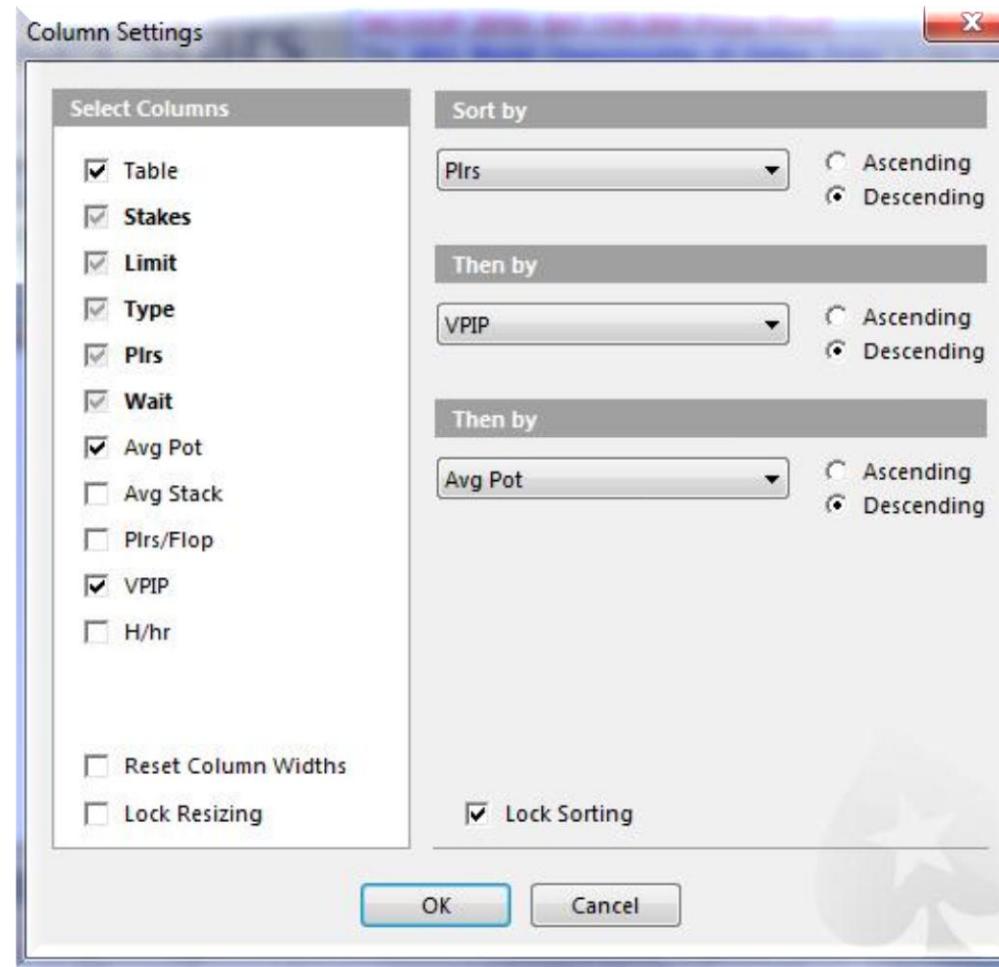
Having a well organized lobby will make your life a lot easier as well. Again I don't want to spend too much time on these topics, but it is worthwhile to say a few things. In this book I will assume that you play at Pokerstars. I realize that not everyone plays there but most do. And if you play elsewhere most other poker rooms have similar lobby options.

The first thing you should do is setup your column settings as shown below.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes



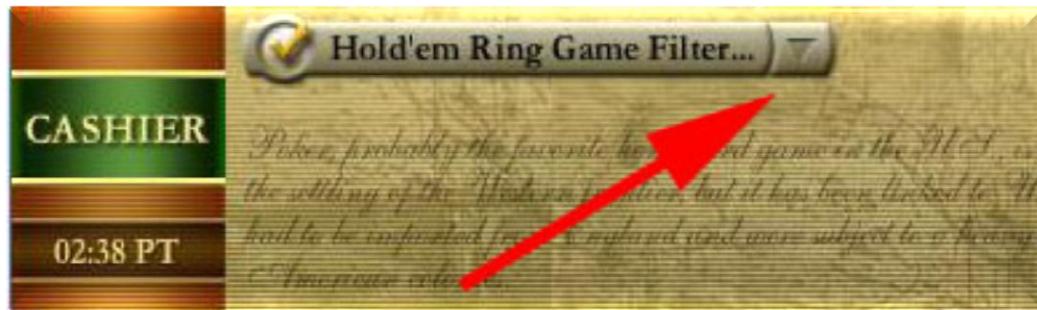
This will bring up the following box.



I suggest using the same settings as those above. This will sort the tables in your lobby by number of players, then average VPIP and then average pot. Make sure to click the “Lock Sorting” box so that you don’t accidentally click on a column and have all your settings undone.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes

Next click on the hold'em ring game filter to setup which types of games will show up in your lobby.



Again I suggest using settings similar to the ones that I use.

Hold'em Ring Game Filter

Max Players <input type="checkbox"/> 2 (1-on-1) <input type="checkbox"/> 6-Max <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 9 to 10 (Full Ring)	Stakes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Min: 0.01 / 0.02 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Max: 0.01 / 0.02 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tables with antes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tables without antes	Limit (No Limit/Pot Limit) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Limit <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pot Limit	Buy-In (No Limit/Pot Limit) <input type="checkbox"/> Short (20-50 Big Blinds) <input type="checkbox"/> Standard (40-100 Big Blinds) <input type="checkbox"/> Deep (100-250 Big Blinds) <input type="checkbox"/> CAP (20 Big Blinds) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other
Currency <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> US Dollars <input type="checkbox"/> Euro	Table Speed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fast tables <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Normal speed tables	Advanced <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Min. Players Seated: 7 <input type="checkbox"/> Min. Average Pot (BB): 5 <input type="checkbox"/> Min. Average Stack (BB): 100 <input type="checkbox"/> Min. Players Per Flop (%): 30 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Min. VPIP (%): 30 <input type="checkbox"/> Min. Hands Per Hour: 80	Other <input type="checkbox"/> Hide full tables <input type="checkbox"/> Show only Daniel's Room
Reset	Help		

I think it is especially important to make sure that you only have one set of stakes showing. You want to have as little unnecessary information on your lobby as possible. But also, I don't think you need to be playing multiple limits at once at any point during your journey through the micros. There are usually more games running at these stakes than any other so you needn't potentially confuse yourself with different blinds and bet sizes. And if you want to play the Euro games (probably a good idea for increased table selection), you can of course check that box as well.

I would recommend setting a minimum amount of players. I use 7 for full ring and 4 for 6max. This prevents a bunch of short-handed tables, which I don't want to play at, from being on my screen. Also, I would suggest

setting a minimum average VPIP for the same reasons. I use 30% for NL2 and I will lower it to 25% for NL5 due to the tighter overall play at that limit. With this highly filtered lobby, you will be able to much more effectively table select on the fly.

Table Selection

Picking the right tables to play at is very important in today's games. And yes, even at stakes as low as NL2. I don't want to scare people off from online poker and portray it as some impossibly tough game. Because it isn't. Not by a long shot. But the games have gotten noticeably more difficult in recent years.

There is still a lot of money to be made in online poker however and it should be noted that rakeback programs have generally improved across all sites to help compensate for the decreased game quality.

But much of this change in the games can still be overcome by simply selecting good tables to play at. And especially if you play at Pokerstars, which has such a massive selection of games, there really is absolutely no reason not to table select. Which tables are the right ones to play at? Nothing surprising here, the ones with fish!

There are a couple of ways to go about table selection. The first one is to tag or color code the fish. This refers to the feature built into the software of most online poker rooms which allows you to mark a player. On Pokerstars you can go,



Crushing The Microstakes

in order to give yourself the ability to one-click tag the fish. You just left click on their circle and choose from the drop down menu.

Since most people are tight these days I now prefer to just tag the exception to the rule, the fish. As mentioned above, the fish are very easy to spot because they will have a high VPIP and a low PFR. As a rule though, I wouldn't even bother looking at the PFR. Just tag anyone who has a VPIP of 40% or more as a fish.

If you continually tag the fish this will help a lot with your table selection over time. For instance if I were to open up the following table,

♣ Crushing The Microstakes



I would already know, before even being dealt a single hand, that there are fish in seat 1 and 4. Obviously I use blue for fish but you can use whichever color you want. The color shows up by their name in the lobby as well which also helps with table selection.

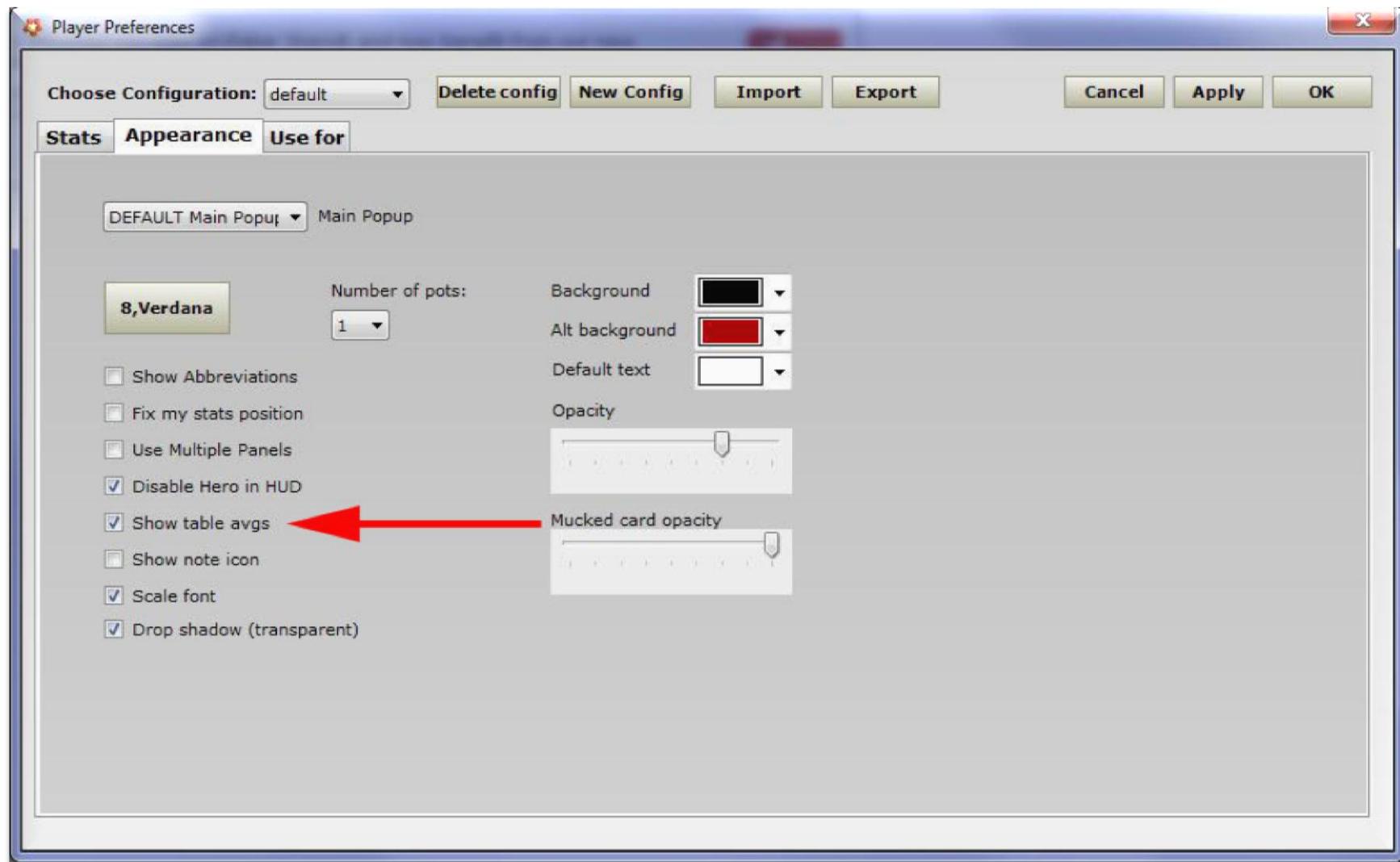
I suggest trying to tag the fish a little bit throughout each session but don't let it interfere with your poker decisions. Instead it is better to do a thorough tagging campaign as you are finishing up your session and closing down your tables. At this point you will also have the maximum sample size on all of your opponents and can therefore be most certain about player types. There are other methods such as using HEM's auto-rate feature but I don't use it much myself.

If you are multi-tabling however things can get pretty hectic and you might not have the time to be doing all this manual color coding. Luckily there is an easier way.

HEM gives you the ability to display the average VPIP right on the table just like all the other stats. This feature can be turned on and off by going,



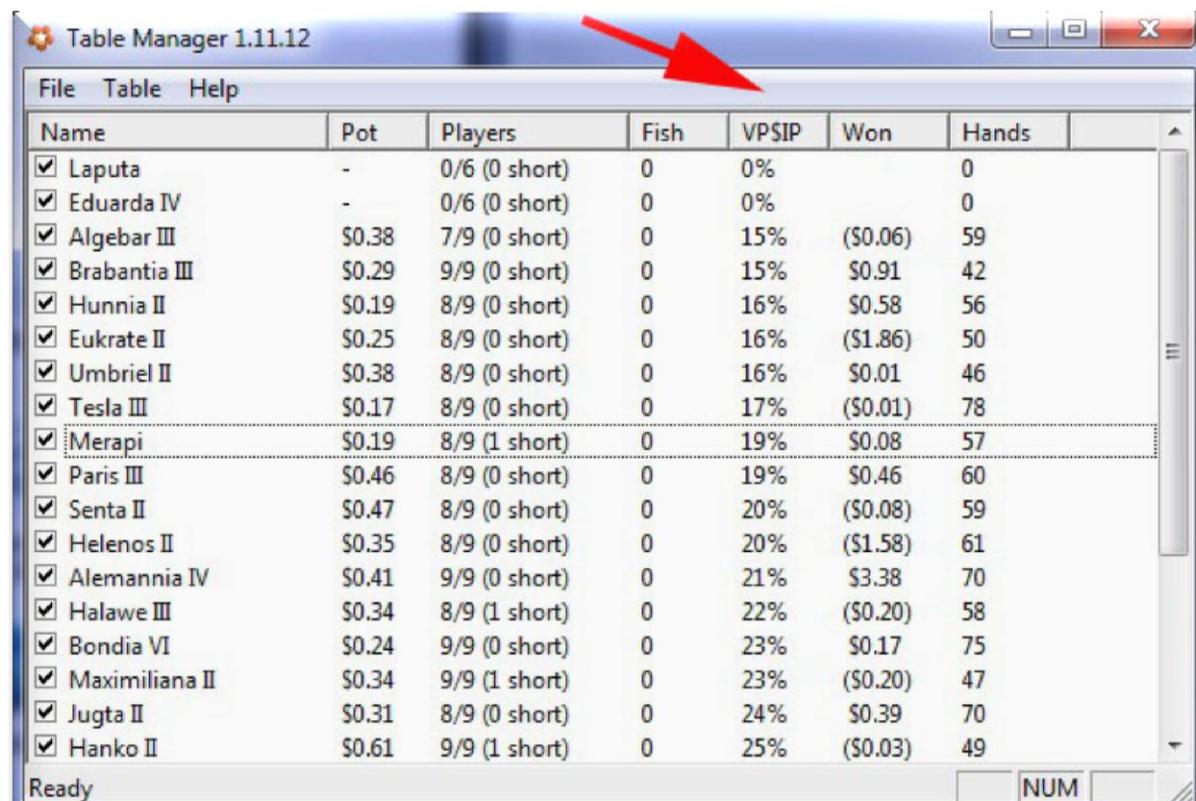
♣ Crushing The Microstakes



Make sure "Show table avgs" is checked as shown above and the average VPIP should show up somewhere near the top center of your tables.

For the most part, if a full ring table has a VPIP under about 15% (20% for 6max), then it is likely full of regs. While it is possible that the table average is simply being brought down by a bunch of huge nits, usually this will not be the case. More often the table won't have any fish on it and you should leave. Fish, with their high VPIP, bring up the table average and therefore it is usually very easy to tell which tables are good ones, and which are bad ones.

However, it may be difficult to keep track of each table's average VPIP especially if you are playing a lot of tables at once. To solve this problem I recommend using HEM's table manager window which can be found on your taskbar, often in the hidden processes while you are importing hands.



Name	Pot	Players	Fish	VPIP	Won	Hands
✓ Laputa	-	0/6 (0 short)	0	0%		0
✓ Eduarda IV	-	0/6 (0 short)	0	0%		0
✓ Algebar III	\$0.38	7/9 (0 short)	0	15%	(\$0.06)	59
✓ Brabantia III	\$0.29	9/9 (0 short)	0	15%	\$0.91	42
✓ Hunnia II	\$0.19	8/9 (0 short)	0	16%	\$0.58	56
✓ Eukrate II	\$0.25	8/9 (0 short)	0	16%	(\$1.86)	50
✓ Umbriel II	\$0.38	8/9 (0 short)	0	16%	\$0.01	46
✓ Tesla III	\$0.17	8/9 (0 short)	0	17%	(\$0.01)	78
✓ Merapi	\$0.19	8/9 (1 short)	0	19%	\$0.08	57
✓ Paris III	\$0.46	8/9 (0 short)	0	19%	\$0.46	60
✓ Senta II	\$0.47	8/9 (0 short)	0	20%	(\$0.08)	59
✓ Helenos II	\$0.35	8/9 (0 short)	0	20%	(\$1.58)	61
✓ Alemannia IV	\$0.41	9/9 (0 short)	0	21%	\$3.38	70
✓ Halawe III	\$0.34	8/9 (1 short)	0	22%	(\$0.20)	58
✓ Bondia VI	\$0.24	9/9 (0 short)	0	23%	\$0.17	75
✓ Maximiliana II	\$0.34	9/9 (1 short)	0	23%	(\$0.20)	47
✓ Jugta II	\$0.31	8/9 (0 short)	0	24%	\$0.39	70
✓ Hanko II	\$0.61	9/9 (1 short)	0	25%	(\$0.03)	49

It will look something like the above. As you can see, you can sort your tables by the VPIP column. And then if you double click on a table, it will immediately bring it into focus. This allows you to quickly find the low VPIP tables and get rid of them.

Here is a video that I recently made where I go through this process in more detail.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ST63euIUpOY>

Joining and Leaving Tables

Just one last note on all this logistical type stuff. When joining a table, always make sure to wait until you are dealt in on the big blind. Posting the big blind in order to get dealt in right away is going to cost you money in the long run because you aren't paying for a full orbit. Take your time and wait for the big blind to come to you.

The only exception to this rule is when there is a certified maniac at the table. And especially if he is open shoving every hand. In this case it is probably better to just post the blind and start playing immediately given the massive amount of positive EV here if you get dealt a good hand.

Conversely, when leaving a table, always wait until you are forced to play the big blind again. Why leave the table if you have free hands still coming to you? Poker is a long term game and you can simply view the beginning of each session as a seamless transition from the end of the last one.

There is one exception to this rule as well. If you are tilting badly it is usually a good idea to simply leave all of your tables immediately. Much more on that later though.

General Approach

Enough of all these details! Let's get to the important stuff here. What should your overall strategy at the tables look like?

The general approach that you should have at the micros is probably not going to be earth shattering in any way to you. Play tight, but not too tight. **I believe that in a full ring game you should play around 15% of the hands that are dealt to you (21% in 6max), and raise preflop with them the vast majority of the time.** You should also play pretty aggressively after the flop. This is basically the TAG style of play that was discussed earlier.

Tight Really is Right

So you don't want to play too tight like the nit player type that was discussed earlier. But you also don't want to play too loose like the SLP or Fish. You want to play an amount of hands that lets you have lots of big value premium holdings in your range like AA, KK and AK but also a bunch of speculative hands like small and mid pairs, suited aces and suited connectors.

Players who play too tight miss out on the profitability of some of these speculative hands that they are folding preflop. But more importantly, they present the image of a total rock. And nobody likes to give action to those kinds of players.

On the flip side, players who play too loose have too many hands in their range that are easily dominated or outkicked. This gets them into all sorts of tricky, marginal spots that are totally unnecessary and potentially tilt inducing.

I would say that the sweet spot for VPIP in full ring is around 11% at the bottom end and 18% at the top end (17% to 24% in 6max). I would not suggest playing outside of this range. Nearly all big winners fall within these numbers in my experience.

As for your PFR, I would recommend that you keep it pretty close to your VPIP. That is, within a few points. So if your VPIP is 15 for instance, then your PFR should be about 12. I will spell out exactly what this means in terms of what hands you should play shortly. I will also explain why there will be a small difference between your VPIP and PFR. So don't get too bogged down by these numbers.

I should mention that it is popular these days, especially on forums, for people to idolize and promote the LAG style of play. As mentioned, I did not include this player type above because you won't encounter many of them at the limits covered in this book.

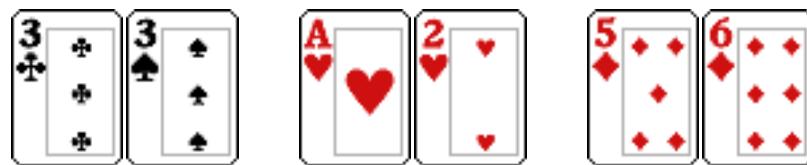
While this style is the fashionable or cool way to play these days, I would definitely advise against it, especially for beginner players. Very few players are able to actually play this style effectively and win. It gets you into all sorts of tricky, marginal situations where you have to adjust your calling and betting ranges based on your image. It is also much easier to tilt when playing this style as when things go bad, they go really bad!

While it may be successfully argued that there is a higher winrate ceiling with this style of play, I generally do not advocate it even for fairly experienced players. This is because you will have to play less tables due to your higher than normal VPIP. The corresponding loss in rakeback may in fact take away any gains that you made with your higher winrate. Always remember that flashy players come and go. Slow and steady wins the race.

The Importance of Initiative

This is one of those areas that beginner level poker players have a lot of trouble with. They don't raise preflop enough. You will even find some extreme cases at the micros where someone is only raising as little as 2% of their hands (basically AA, KK, QQ and AK)!

This kind of thinking is completely understandable though. Why risk more than the minimum especially with really speculative hands like,



Why not just see a flop as cheaply as possible and if you don't hit, fold with a minimal loss? All valid points.

But the problem with this line of thinking is that poker isn't a game where you only make money when you have a good hand. The beautiful thing about this game is that **people very rarely have anything good. So there is an enormous amount of "dead money" just sitting around waiting to be had most of the time.**

Good winning players know this and seize the initiative before the flop. If they end up making a hand, awesome. If not, they have given themselves another way to win the pot as well though; by taking it down preflop or by following up with another bet on the flop.

Secondly, when the pot gets limped preflop people are far less likely to play a big pot with you. They are more inclined to play their hand straight forward and fold when they miss. They do this because they are thinking the exact same thing that you were thinking: "I've invested such a small amount, I'll just fold and move on."

However, when you raise preflop that gets some money in the middle on the flop. People are far more likely to want to fight for this. And ultimately they will make big mistakes fighting for it.

However instead of rattling off a bunch more arguments in support of raising preflop why don't we just look at some cold hard facts from HEM?

Go into the "reports" tab and go,



Add in these values

- VPIP = True
- PFR = True

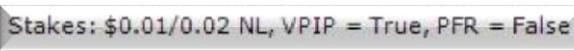
This will ensure that HEM only shows hands where you voluntarily entered the pot and raised. You can filter by a specific stake if you wish. I used a 700k hand sample at NL2 from this year. My filters look like this.



Now find your winrate when filtered for these scenarios. Here are my results.

Game Type Description	Game	Hands	VPIP%	PFR%	BB/100
\$0.01/0.02 NL	holdem	80413	100.0	100.0	112.64

As you can see I am winning at 113 BB/100 when I voluntarily play a hand and raise preflop with it. Let's have a look at the reverse now. I will change my filters slightly so that PFR = False instead of True. It will look like this.



Now let's have a look at my results again over this same sample when I limp or call a raise instead.

Game Type Description	Game	Hands	VPIP%	PFR%	BB/100
\$0.01/0.02 NL	holdem	23367	100.0	0.0	57.76

As you can see I am only winning at 58 BB/100 now. My winrate when limping or calling preflop is about half of what it is when I raise! Now to be fair my hand strength is generally going to be a lot stronger when raising as opposed to limping or calling. However I don't think that this is enough of a reason to explain the massive difference in winrate.

The real reason goes back to what I said before about there being a bunch of dead money out there waiting to be had. Here are my winnings when I raise preflop but do not see a showdown.

W\$woSD
\$1196.05

And here they are when I limp or call.

W\$woSD
-\$388.82

A big reason for the difference in the winrates above is my inability to win the pot when I don't have the initiative. I am actually losing money in these situations when it doesn't go to showdown. However when I raise preflop I am picking up a lot of pots even when I have nothing because I have initiative and people give me credit.

This is all the "proof" that I need. When in doubt, raise it up.

The Importance of Position

Poker is a game of position. It is one of the most important aspects of the game in my opinion and is often overlooked by new and even seasoned players. Why does it matter so much?

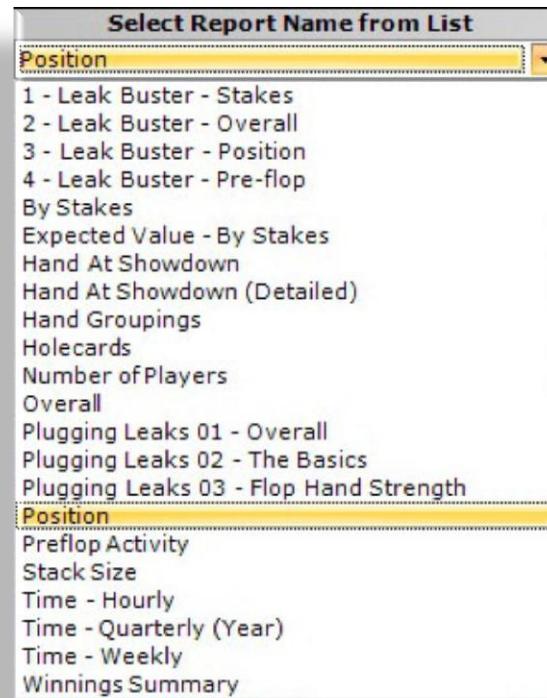
Position is so important because poker is a game of incomplete information. You don't know what your opponent has and he doesn't know what you have. But throughout the course of a hand people give away big clues as to what they are holding. Having some information about your opponent's hand strength before you reveal anything about yours is an enormous advantage.

Being out of position (OOP) in a hand means that you essentially have to play it blind. The person playing the hand in position (IP) has the benefit of seeing what you do and then deciding what they would like to do. This allows them to play the size of pot that they want.

As I will discuss later, the issue of extraction (getting the maximum out of your big hands) is one of the most important keys to your success at the micros. And one of the biggest differences between being OOP and being IP in a hand is the ability to extract.

When you are IP you can always get that last bet in or you can choose to raise. You have all the options, all the advantages in the hand and that just equates to more money, period. As the old saying goes "money flows towards the button" in poker.

But since cold hard facts are the surest way to prove a point let's use that same 700k hand sample from NL2 and have a look at my winrates by position. You can find this information on the upper left hand corner of the "reports" tab in HEM. Choose position from the drop down menu.



Position	Hands	Winnings	BB/100
1) small blind	91081	-\$225.46	-6.19
2) big blind	89604	-\$419.49	-11.70
3) early	191240	\$746.10	9.75
4) middle	147345	\$724.60	12.29
5) cutoff	90448	\$697.47	19.28
6) button	91904	\$957.56	26.05
	701622	\$2480.78	8.84

As you can see, there are some enormous differences here. In fact, I have “lossrates” for both blinds. And that is actually completely normal! Nobody wins from the blinds. But more on that later. Suffice it to say for now, position is of vital importance when playing poker.

You will probably hear me say it again many times throughout this book that the two “secrets” to poker success are initiative and position. This is why I mentioned these points here before anything else. You need to constantly remind yourself of this when at the tables.

Preflop

Having a perfect preflop strategy isn’t nearly as important as most people think. This is because postflop is where the large majority of the real money is won or lost. But everything starts before the flop, and if you don’t have a solid strategy for what to do, the mistakes will be compounded later on in the hand. So it is definitely worth spending a good amount of time talking about this street.

Range

Something that I want to briefly mention first however is this idea of a “range.” I have used this word a few times so far in this book already and you will no doubt notice it many more times. **A range is simply a rough approximation of every single hand that you think your opponent can have in a certain situation.**

Since it is very difficult to ever put somebody on an exact hand, it is best to discuss a poker situation based on the number of possible hands that they could be holding. And we can break it down even further and talk about the bottom or top of their range. I will use a simple analogy with numbers to make sure that this is all clear.

Imagine that there are 100 ping pong balls labelled 1 through 100. And further assume that the higher the number on the ball, the more value it has. I have all the ping pong balls numbered 50-60.

So my range is 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59 and 60. The absolute bottom of my range is the number 50 ball. The absolute top of my range is the number 60 ball. Similarly in poker we should always think about our opponent’s likely holdings as a range, not a specific hand. The actual hand that they will show up with at showdown will be a random hand within that range.

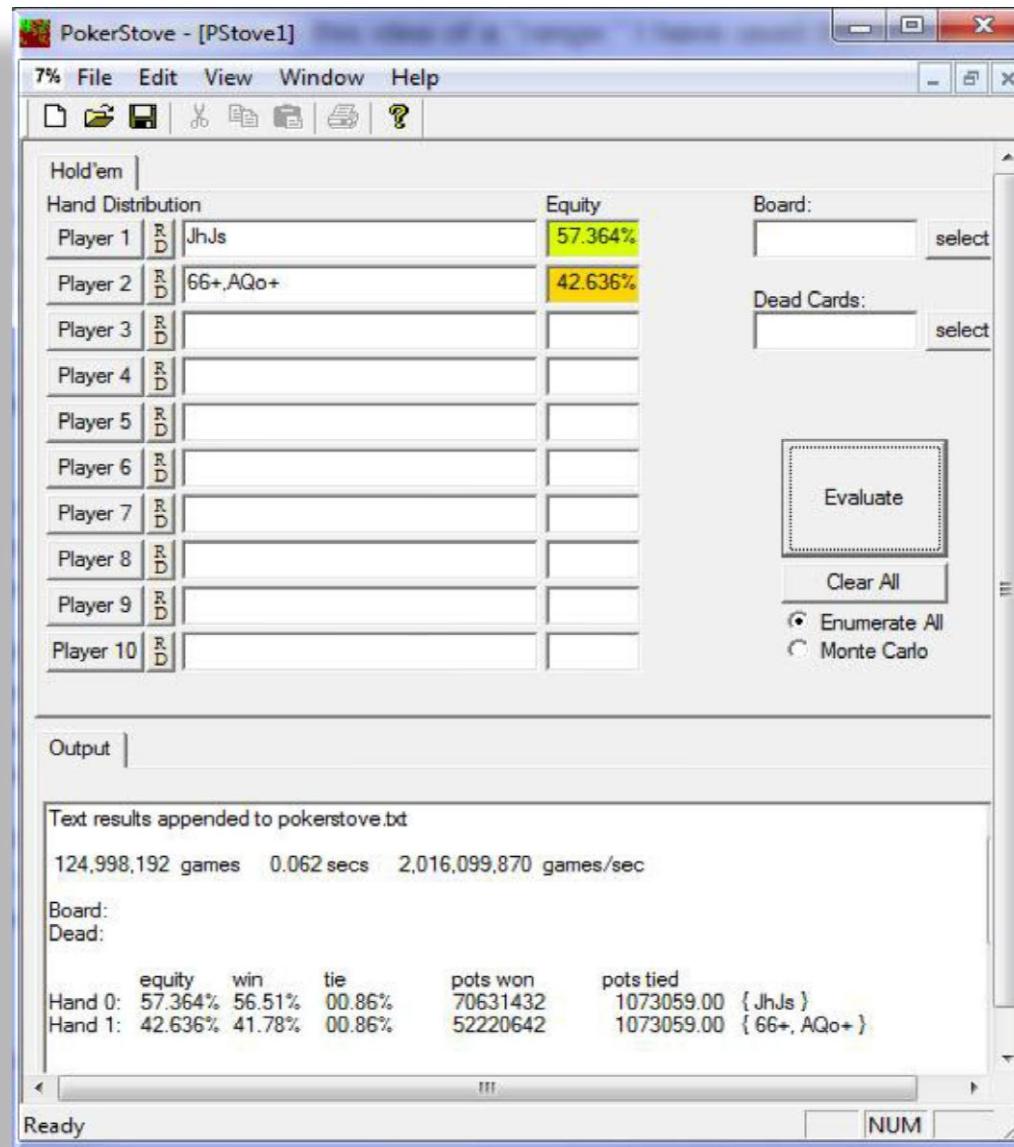
Just as a quick side note. People often talk about “running bad” or “running good.” And this basically just refers to the short term whimsical luck element that I already discussed earlier. But really what they are saying if they are running bad is that their opponents keep showing up with the top end of their range. And vice versa if they are running good. As difficult or easy as it can be at times, depending on how you are running, you must always remember that your decisions in poker should be based on your opponent’s entire range, not any one part of it.

Perhaps there are a dozen different hands that you think your opponent can have in a particular situation and only a couple of them beat you. Just because he shows up with the very top of his range **this time** does not mean that you played the hand improperly. And the reverse is true as well.

Crushing The Microstakes

A great free tool that I recommend for analyzing hands and getting you thinking more in terms of ranges is [Pokerstove](#). This program will allow you to plug in the exact hands that you put your opponent on and find your percentage to win (equity) over an enormous sample. Here is a very simple example of that.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes



In this very simplistic example, if 66+ and AQo+ was your opponent's exact range, and you got all the money in preflop, you should be pretty happy with that decision given your edge in equity (57% vs his 43%). You need to remember that he can show up with any hand in that range though. Just because he has AA this time does not mean that you played the hand poorly. And conversely just because he shows up with 66 next time does not mean that you somehow played the hand better.

The equity numbers are the only variables that matter. The result is just a detail. The result in this particular instance is just a part of the short term madness. In the long run, your play here was good against that range. And that is all that matters.

Play What Hands Where?

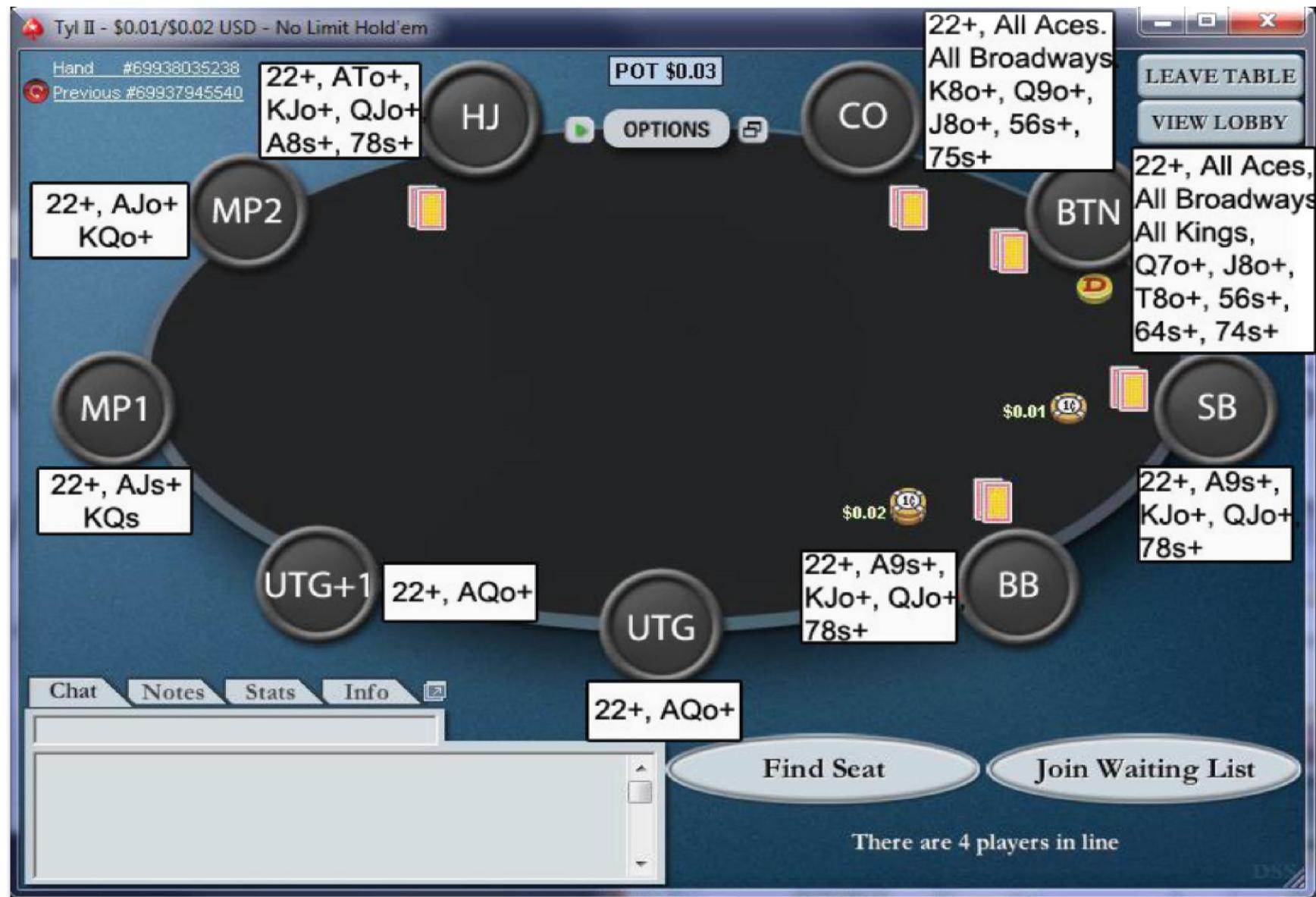
So what hands should you actually play then? As I mentioned before, I think you should be looking to play about 15% of all hands that you are dealt in full ring and 21% in 6max. However, given the importance of position, you will want to construct your range with the goal of acting last as much as possible. But obviously you can't pick and choose your hand strength based on your position. You get dealt two random cards each time. So it is kind of a balancing act. While hand strength is an important consideration, your position at the table should also be a big determining factor in whether or not you decide to play a hand.

So enough buildup! Let's just get to the proverbial starting hands chart.

Note #1: 6max players should ignore the first 3 seats (UTG, UTG+1 and MP1). Then the chart represents my exact range for that game.

Note #2: When it says something like "K8o+" I mean all suited and offsuit variations of a king above this. In this example, K8s, K9o, K9s, KTo, KTs, KJo, KJs, KQo and KQs.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes



By following the suggestions above you will have a VPIP that is probably nearing 20% in full ring and 30% in 6max. You certainly don't have to play every single hand listed above though. And if you are a mass multi-tabler or a beginner level player, I would definitely suggest that you omit some of the hands at the bottom end of this range. Especially some of the crappier ones in the HJ, CO and BTN.

This chart is not meant to be copied verbatim. It is just a rough guideline. You will not suffer catastrophic consequences if you play a hand that is not on it or fold one that is on it. This chart is meant to represent the upper limit of what hands you should generally be looking to play, according to position, in a 6max or full ring game.

Really the most important thing to take away from this chart however is the positional bias in starting hand selection. You can see that I play a lot more hands as I get closer to the button. In terms of pure numbers I play about 4 times as many hands from the BTN and CO as I do from UTG.

There is one last very important disclaimer to mention before I talk about this chart in greater detail. The suggested range above is only for when you are first to enter the pot or there have been limpers. If somebody has raised in front of you, the suggested range will be quite a bit tighter with some exceptions if there are fish involved. I will discuss all of that in plenty of detail later though.

Range by Position

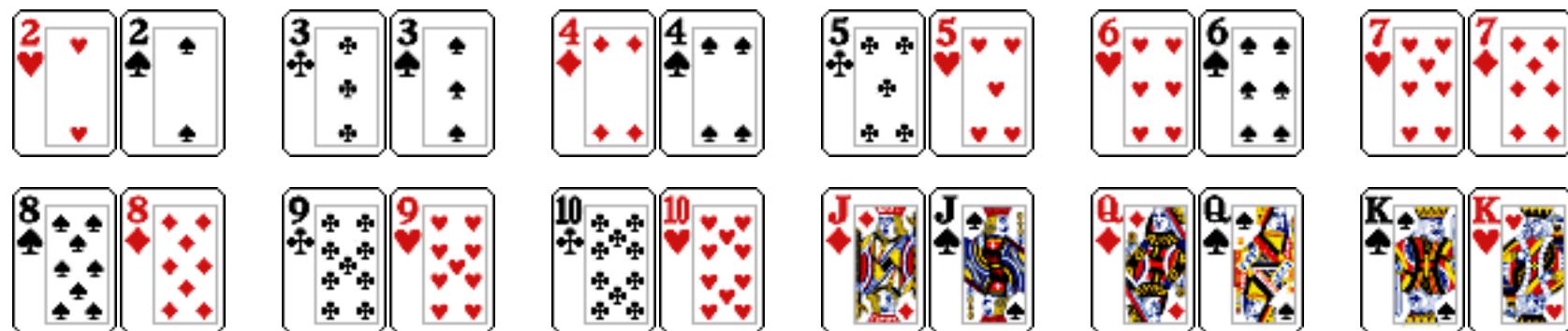
So there is a lot to talk about here. First let's classify 4 different groups of starting positions. I am going to use my idea of the positions here. I know that some people may have some slightly different opinions on this. But this is how I view the poker table. There are 4 general starting positions.

- Early Position (EP)
- Middle Position (MP)
- Late Position (LP)
- The Blinds

EP

Early position includes under the gun (UTG) and (UTG+1) in full ring. EP refers to the first person to act preflop in 6max. In these positions, you will have to act first before the flop and will only have position on the blinds after the flop. Due to this positional disadvantage, it is very difficult to maintain a good winrate from these positions. As we saw before, over an enormous sample at NL2, my EP winrate was the lowest of any winning position.

So as is often the case, the simplest solution is in fact the best one; you should try to limit the number of hands that you play from these positions. At about 8% of hands in full ring (12% in 6max), the recommended range is all combinations of the following hands.





Small Pairs in EP

Now I mentioned before that I think you should be entering the pot as the preflop raiser the vast majority of the time. However there are a couple exceptions which explains the small gap between VPIP and PFR. Here is one of them. At NL2 and NL5, you should limp 22-66 when you are in EP.

This just allows you to keep the pot as small as possible so that you can try and cheaply hit your set. Now I know that this flies in the face of what was discussed earlier about the importance of initiative. However there are few reasons why this situation is different than most others.

These hands don't have a lot of value unimproved OOP. Since we are only going to flop a set in around 1 in 8.5 opportunities, the vast majority of the time we are going to be stuck OOP, vainly hoping to take it down with a cbet, on an all or nearly all overcard flop.

Furthermore, since the stacks are often deep at these limits and the players are so bad after the flop, I think it is important to see flops with these hands as often as possible. Limping keeps the size of the pot as small as possible before the flop and allows you to get in there.

However, you really shouldn't worry about these spots too much. I have run the numbers over huge samples in HEM and I have consistently found that these hands are only very marginal winners at best from EP no matter how you play them. And so yes, it is perfectly fine to raise or just fold them as well.

At NL10 and higher where the players are generally more competent, and stacks are often shallower, I generally just fold these hands preflop in EP.

(*2015 Note: I no longer believe that limping 22-66 in EP is a good idea at any stake due to changes in the way that the games play (less completely clueless fish) and the introduction of Zoom where the max buyin is only 100bb. I think you should raise these hands from EP at NL2 and fold them at NL5 and higher. However, I have left the original preceding text here unaltered as it still holds educational and practical value especially in regards to extremely loose and deepstacked games).

Limp Re-Raising in EP

Limp re-raising your big hands (especially AA and KK) is a fairly popular tactic especially among regulars at NL2 and NL5. I should add that the only time that you should ever attempt a limp re-raise is when you are in EP and at a full ring table. This is because you want to give yourself the best possible chance of getting a raise behind you. This is of course statistically more likely to occur with more people that are left to act behind you.

I don't think limp re-raising is a very useful strategy however. The reason for this is that most games at these limits are very passive. Therefore your chances of getting a raise behind you is often quite low.

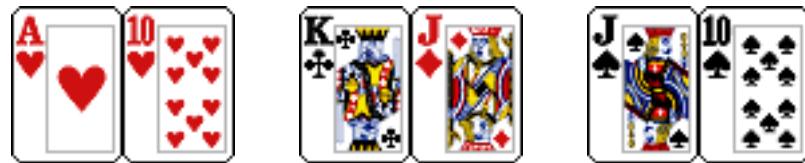
However, in the rare case that you are at a table which happens to be aggressive, and especially with bad aggressive players, this can be a viable tactic. I talked earlier about having the average VPIP enabled in HEM so that it displays on each table. Well when this feature is turned on, it will also display the average PFR right beside it. If I see that this number is above 10 at a full ring table (15% in 6max) then I will attempt the old limp re-raise with AA or KK from time to time. But in general I think you should just make a standard raise with these hands here the large majority of the time.

MP

The middle positions (MP1 and MP2 in full ring, 2nd person to act preflop in 6max) are a little bit more profitable because you will get to play a few more pots with the benefit of position. However, you don't want to go overboard here. As we saw, the winrates from these positions, while better than EP, still aren't very spectacular. So I recommend just using the same range as EP but with the addition of a few big broadway value type hands in full ring such as:



and a few more hands in 6max such as:



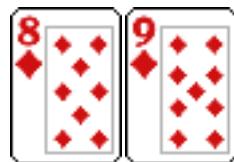
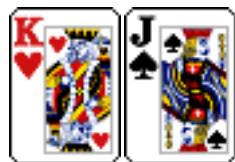
LP

Late position (HJ, CO and BTN in full ring, just the CO and BTN in 6max) is the place to go nuts. As you no doubt noticed in the above winrates chart, this is where the real money is being made. And it increases sharply as we approach the button.

I recommend abusing these positions and I do mean that in every sense. Anytime you are close to the button you should act like you own it. I always use the analogy of a professional sports team that is playing at home. Players will often say stuff like “this is our house!” or “nobody is going to come in here and beat us!”

You should approach your late position hands with a similar mentality. Think of it as your turf. You are in control of the hand when in these positions, not anybody else.

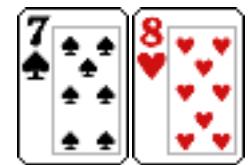
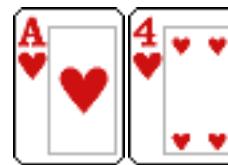
Therefore you should be raising and 3betting with a wide variety of hands from these positions (more on 3betting later). From the Hijack (HJ) you should still keep your range fairly conservative. However you should add quite a few hands that you weren’t playing in MP. Stuff like,



From the cutoff (CO) and button (BTN) however, I would recommend playing around 40% of your hands in full ring or 6max. This includes all the hands from the HJ range in full ring (MP in 6max) plus a whole host of other suited and unsuited high card strength and connecting type hands.

While I previously recommended that you limit the number of hands that you play in EP due to the relative unprofitability of the position, I advocate just the opposite here. As we saw before, these two positions are the most profitable spots at the table. Therefore, you should go out of your way to get involved in as many pots as possible from them.

So while this range is too long to list, here are some of the types of hands that I regularly open with from these positions,



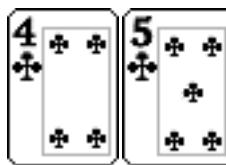
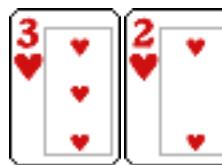
You don't want to go too crazy however. You should still be folding a slight majority of all hands that you are dealt. But this is definitely the spot to open up a lot wider than you are perhaps used to. A good rule of thumb to follow is this:



You should be playing around 3 times as many hands from the CO and BTN as you are from EP.

And you can increase this ratio even more as you get more comfortable playing a wider range. The main idea here however is that you need to be highly aware of your position at the poker table. When you are near the button you can turn all sorts of relative junk into winners due to the inherent advantages of the position.

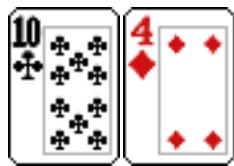
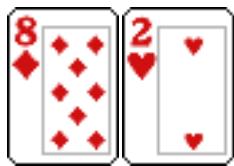
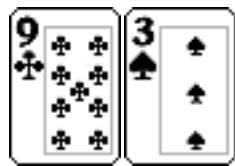
As I said though, you will need to use some discretion so as not to go overboard here. You should still pitch stuff like the really small suited connectors,



Along with all the stuff that has a high card (which is not an ace or a king), is unsuited and has no kicker such as,

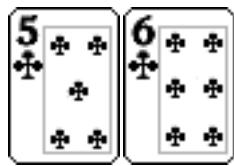
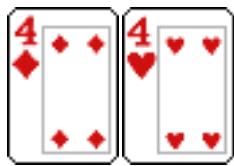


And the whole spectrum of obvious trash like,



However, if the blinds are especially tight (both nits for instance) then you should include some of the above hands and maybe even some total trash. But you get the general idea here. You should play loose and aggressive when you are around the button.

As a final note, there will be some occasions where it is ok to limp behind some parts of your LP range. These are generally spots where there are a lot of limpers in front of you (3 or more) and you have a weak, speculative type hand such as,



The reason for this is pretty similar to the situation with small pairs in EP. These hands don't have a whole lot of value unimproved. Furthermore, there are so many people in the pot already that we might have a difficult time taking it down. These hands can nail the flop hard and win you a big pot though. Therefore, it is fine to keep the pot small and just try to flop something huge. Just raising up all the limpers is completely fine as well though.

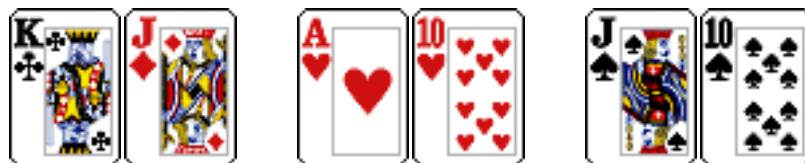
The Blinds

Last and definitely least are the blinds, small (SB) and big (BB). As you also undoubtedly noticed in the winrate chart above, I am losing money quite badly from these positions. And as mentioned, this is actually completely

normal. This is because you are forced to put money into the pot with a random hand and play it OOP. There is just no way to overcome this disadvantage.

So you pretty much need to just accept that fact and move on. I approach the blinds as a damage control situation. My goal is simply to lose the least.

So similar to the logic behind the EP range, you should keep your range fairly tight from these positions. But not quite as tight. When the pot is limped around you should complete from the SB, or raise from either blind, with a few more speculative and high card type hands such as,



And similarly, if it gets folded to you in the small blind, you can attempt to steal with a reasonably wide range. Not too wide though as you will have to play the hand OOP when called. However, like I mentioned before in the LP steal situations, this will be player dependent. If the BB is a huge nit for instance, you can open up your range considerably because he will fold so often. If he is an aggressive TAG who will 3bet you a lot then you may want to tighten up a bit.

How Much Should You Raise?

So now that you know which hands you should play from where, how much should you raise with them? This is going to be one of the first instances where my recommended strategy will be dependent upon on which limit you are playing. So I will discuss them separately.

NL2

At NL2 I recommend raising 4x the big blind or 8 cents as your standard open. However, you should make it 3x or 6 cents in LP. There are several reasons for this. And these reasons are universal (i.e., they don't just apply to NL2).

- We have a lot of junky speculative hands in our range so we don't want to risk very much
- We have position so we don't mind encouraging action
- We want to be able to get away (or sometimes call) for a cheaper amount when we get 3bet.
- We don't need to risk much. People fold to steals a lot regardless of the raise size.

With premium hands at NL2 however you should ignore all of the above. Firstly, what is a premium hand? Like before with the starting positions, I am just going to go by my idea of what a premium hand is. Other people may have different definitions. Premium hands for me are AK and TT+.

With these hands at NL2 I recommend that you make a larger than normal sized raise from all positions. And I sort of stagger it depending on the strength of the hand. So with TT and JJ I might make it 5x or 10c. With QQ and AK I will make it 6x. And with AA and KK I will usually make it 8x or sometimes more.

Why do I do this?

As I mentioned before, every situation in poker is different and that is why there is no single best way to play a hand. It always depends on a myriad of different factors like stack sizes, the opponent's skill level, game flow and so on. But in general we need to ask ourselves this question when playing our monster hands at any level.

"What is the maximum amount that I can charge here, while still maintaining a high amount of sales (calls)?"

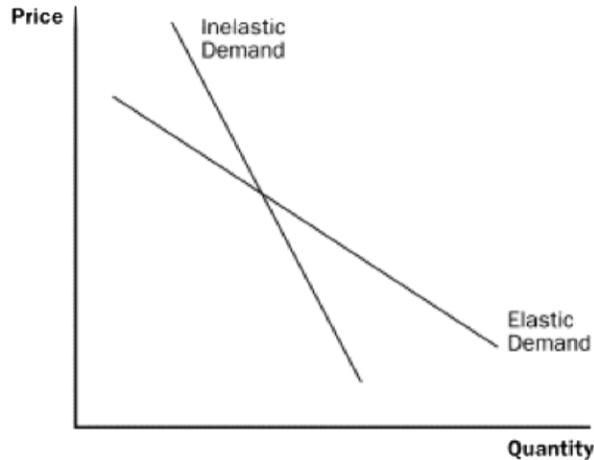
Having flashbacks to University economics? Fell asleep during it? Don't worry I did too! But there were some important lessons to be learned that apply here in poker.

*(*2015 Note: I no longer believe that this over-raising strategy is the most effective strategy at NL2 due to changes in the way that the games play. I think a standard raise to 4x will yield better results in most circumstances. Many people have read this book now and/or figured out what an 8x raise means and will not pay you off. This is not to say that these strategies are not effective in games with lots of massive fish or in extremely loose live games though. So as before, I have left the original text here and the following section unaltered).*

Quick Economics Detour

The main idea at play here is that you want to view your opponent, and especially the fish, as customers. So you should make many of your poker decisions in a similar way that a business owner would.

In economic theory there is a concept called "elasticity of demand."



This refers to what people are willing to pay for a product or service.

When the demand is elastic your sales will fluctuate wildly depending on where you set your price. People can easily find alternatives or they just don't generally consider your product to be that important to them.

When demand is inelastic however, your sales volume isn't affected anywhere near as much by the price you set. This is because the customer sees a high value in your product or service and there aren't any clear alternatives. "Money is no object" as the saying goes.

The same principle applies here in poker. Instead of always going by the book you should ask yourself how much is this **customer** willing to pay to see the flop. If there is one thing that bad players love to do, it is to see as many flops as possible. They don't like to fold preflop and are often willing to pay a premium to stay in the hand.

In fact many bad players do not even look at the raise size before finding the call button. They only briefly glance at it to make sure that it is not something ludicrous to them like all in or half a stack. Most of the time in the

business world it is a poor decision to charge less than what the customer is willing to pay. And the same principle applies here.

Really bad players at these limits will often be willing to call 8 or 10 big blinds to see a flop just as readily as 3 big blinds. I think the biggest reason why this is the case is that the raise amount is always in cents. It's pocket change to them. There is no difference between 6c and 16c to them. Why would you ever go with the smaller amount if you have one of the best starting hands possible and you know that they will call?

So I would recommend making some larger than normal raise sizes with your premium hands (especially AA and KK) especially when you notice that there are some really bad players left to act. Always remember that this is "no limit" hold'em. You don't have to adhere to any rules on what to bet. That's what limit hold'em is for.

There are some great postflop benefits to over-raising with premium hands. By artificially juicing up the size of the pot you will be working with a much larger than normal pot on the flop. And if you make a bet on the flop and there is a call, you will be dealing with a much bigger pot than normal on the turn and so on.

This is not a bad thing when you have one of the best starting hands possible. It also allows you to much more easily get deep stacks in the middle by the river. Bad players will often feel like they are "pot committed."

You might be asking yourself this though: Am I not going to be giving away the strength of my hand with my raise size? What if somebody is paying attention to this?

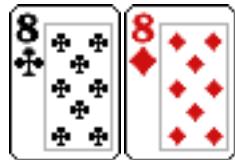
My answer for this is simple. They aren't. They aren't paying attention. I have been getting away with these ludicrous raise sizes for years and have even used them countless times in my videos for DragTheBar! Do I think anybody has exploited me in any significant way regarding this? Nope.

And if you have any worries, just mix in a normal raise size every once in awhile to throw them off. I actually do this quite regularly especially if I see that there are only regs left to act. The above suggestions, as is often the case throughout this book, are just that, suggestions. You should not do them 100% of the time.

You shouldn't do anything 100% of the time in poker. You should regularly be thinking about how you might be able to exploit your opponents mistakes however, even if that means doing some wacky things that none of the "experts" advise.

Example:

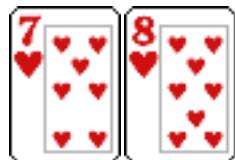
In MP you have,



You should raise it to $4x = 8c$.

Example:

In LP you have,



You should raise it to $3x = 6c$.

Example:

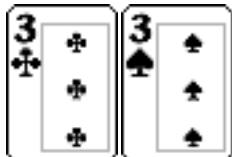
In EP you have,



You should raise it to $4x = 8c$.

Example:

In EP you have,



You should raise it to $4x = 8c$.

NL5

At NL5 and higher I have a much more ordinary approach to my opening raise sizes. This is because there are more regulars at these limits and more players who are likely to be paying at least some attention. I don't think you will be able to get away with quite as much of the crazy stuff that I suggested for NL2. So you may have to tone it down a bit.

I recommend making it 3x from every position. Making it 2.5x or 12c from LP is fine as well. This is a standard raise size at higher limits and it is fine to encourage more action in LP as discussed before.

With that said, if you notice a huge fish or two behind you, I wouldn't hesitate to try out some larger NL2 style sizings though. Fish are fish at any limit. And especially at stakes where the raise sizes are still almost always going to be in cents (not dollars) the differing amounts aren't going to mean that much to them anyways.

Example:

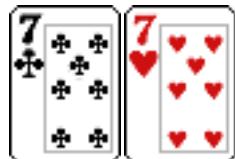
In EP you have,



You should raise it to 3x = 15c.

Example:

In MP you have,



You should raise it to 3x = 15c.

Example:

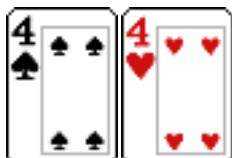
In LP you have,



You should raise it to $2.5x = 12c$.

Example:

In EP you have,



You should raise it to $3x = 15c$.

Limpers

If somebody limps in front of you, you should learn to interpret that as free money. The famous grinder Dusty "Leatherass" Schmidt put it this way once, and I am loosely quoting, "When you notice some money on the ground do you just walk by or do you stop and pick it up?" The same principle applies here. Limping is a sign of weakness and you need to take advantage of it.

It is difficult to give many hard and fast rules in poker as so often the best answer is "it depends." Not in this case however. If there are one or two limpers in front of you, and you have any of the hands that were listed above by position, you should raise it up.

Should You Raise More When There Are Limpers?

Absolutely. You should raise your standard amount plus an extra big blind for each limper.

This is a situation at the micros where I constantly see inexperienced players making a mistake. They make the same raise size whether there are a bunch of limpers or they are first in the pot. If one limper calls usually the rest will call like a domino effect. When that many people call you, somebody is very likely to have hit a decent part of the flop. This will make it much harder for you to win the pot because you will now need to make a good hand yourself.



You always need to remember that the whole point of a preflop raise is to either take down the pot right then and there or to see a flop with one or two people at most. And preferably only one other.

Now this is going to be game and player specific. As mentioned before, some players, especially bad ones, will be willing to call nearly anything to see the flop. Conversely, some players will habitually limp and fold for even

the smallest amount. As a rule though, the one big blind for each limper on top of your standard raise should get the job done. I will sometimes even add an additional big blind on top of this though with multiple limpers especially at NL2 to avoid the domino effect of calls. As I keep reminding you though, do not be afraid to improvise if game conditions demand it.

Lastly, at the micros you will often encounter the situation where you are in the BB, it is folded to the SB and he limps. You should raise 4x. Your range should be around 50% of your hands as they will fold an incredible amount of the time. And even when they don't fold you will have position and initiative, which as mentioned, are the two ingredients for success in poker.

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c.

In MP you have,

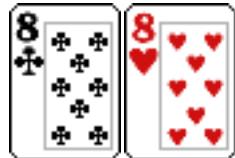


And there are two limpers.

You should raise it to $6x = 12c$ (4x standard + 2x for the limpers).

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c.

In LP you have,



And there is one limper.

You should raise it to $4x = 8c$ (3x standard + 1x for the limper).

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c.

In MP you have,



And there is one limper.

You should raise it to $5x = 10c$ (4x standard + 1x for the limper).

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c.

In LP you have,



And there are three limpers.

You should raise it to $6x = 30c$ (3x standard + 3x for the limpers).

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c.

In LP you have,



And there is one limper.

You should raise it to $4x = 20c$ (3x standard + 1x for the limper).

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c.

In the BB you have,



And the SB open limps.

You should raise it to 4x = 20c.

OOP With Limpers?

I mentioned in the last section that a common leak among players at these limits is not increasing their raise size to compensate for limpers. Well the same thing goes for when they are in the blinds. As I said before, there is nothing worse than taking a hand to the flop with half the table involved. It will be much harder to win the pot than if it was heads up or even two-way for instance. Well actually I lied. There is something worse. Seeing a flop with half the table and having to act first on every street!

I mentioned before that you need to add one big blind per limper. **You should also add another big blind per limper if you are in the blinds.** This is to compensate for your positional disadvantage.

Always remember that when you are OOP you especially want to dissuade others from playing a pot with you. You should be happy to take it down right now. This is because you won't win the pot nearly as much of the time when you are OOP. There is absolutely nothing wrong with taking down all those dead blinds right now. Think of it this way, you've now paid for a free orbit or two without even having to see a flop!

And while a small thing, adding the extra big blind will also ensure that the pot size is larger than normal on the flop. This actually helps us because it lowers the stack to pot ratio (SPR). The less manoeuvrability that there is after the flop, the less position matters.

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c

In the BB you have,



And there are two limpers.

You should raise it to $8x = 16c$ (4x standard + 2x for the limpers + 2x for the positional disadvantage).

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c.

In the SB you have,



And there are three limpers.

You should raise it to $9x = 18c$ (4x standard + 3x for the limpers + 2x for the positional disadvantage).*

*When there are three or more limpers and I am OOP I may cap my raise size so that it doesn't get too big and prevent all action.

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c.

In the SB you have,



And there is one limper.

You should raise it to $5x = 25c$ (3x standard + 1x for the limper + 1x for the positional disadvantage).

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c.

In the big blind you have,



And there are two limpers.

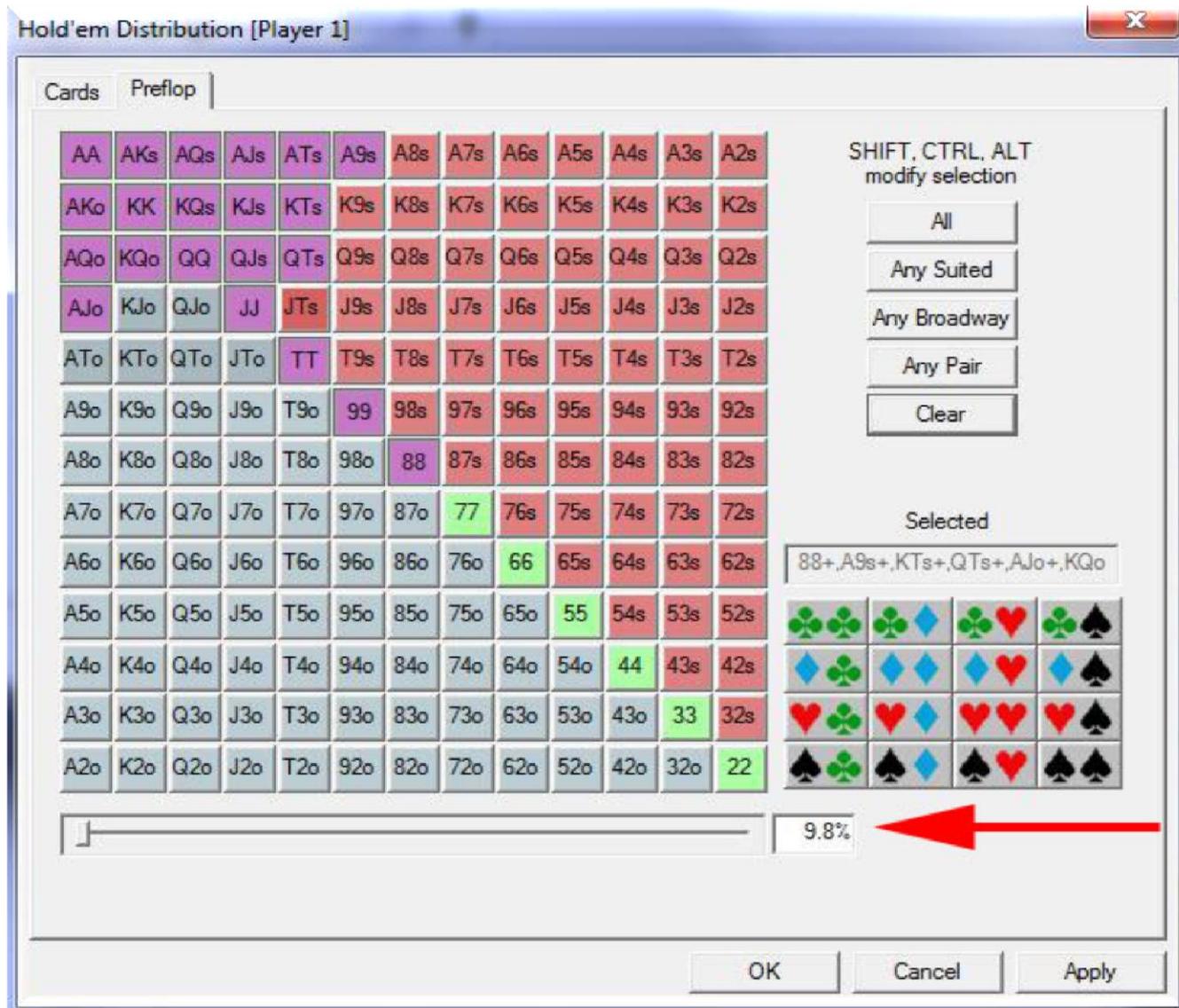
You should raise it to $7x = 35c$ (3x standard + 2x for the limpers + 2x for the positional disadvantage).

Calling Raises

Now we can finally talk about what to do if somebody has already raised it in front of you. Well first things first, we need to consider what a raise from somebody else at the table actually means. As we saw earlier, there are several different player types. And a raise will mean different things depending on which type made it. So this is where our HUD will come in handy. If you have a good enough sample (around 20 hands or more) you can look at their PFR stat and narrow their range a bit.

It might be a good idea to plug in some PFR ranges into Pokerstove if you have never done this before. Click on a player and then click on the pre flop tab. You can then type in a PFR number or use the scroll bar. For instance, all the hands in purple below is what a roughly 10% (albeit broadway heavy) PFR range looks like.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes



Now before you start putting your opponent on an exact range it is very important to note their position at the table. As I mentioned before position is incredibly important in poker. This doesn't mean that all of your opponents are aware of that however. In fact many at the micros will not be.

But as a general rule, people will play more hands the closer they get to the button without even thinking about it. And there are plenty of grinders these days, even at the lowest limits, who do in fact show some signs of positional awareness.

There is an easy way to check all of this in HEM however which is noted in the full popup below.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes

Player Name		1647 hands -9.44 BB/100						
Lost \$3.10	Time	5m	10m	20m	session			
Won/lost		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0			
Pre-flop	Total	EP	MP	CO	BTN	SB	BB	
VP\$IP	11%	7%	10%	15%	19%	15%	10%	
Call Open	7%	0%	(24) 5%	(84) 8%	(64) 11%	(71) 9%	(90) 7%	(98)
Limp	2%	1%	1%	3%	4%	2%	(85) 0%	(52)
PFR	8%	6%	8%	10%	12%	9%	6%	
Raise 1st	9%	6%	10%	16%	(68) 20%	(46) 18%	(28) --	
3-Bet	4%	4%	(24) 2%	(84) 5%	(64) 3%	(71) 7%	(90) 4%	(98)
Fold to 3B	73% (11)	4-Bet	9% (11)					
Fold to 4B	100%(2)	4B range	0.7% (11)					
Steal (total)	Vs Steal				SB	BB		
	CO	Btn	SB		Fold	80% (15)	87% (30)	
	18%	16% (68)	20% (46)	18% (28)	Call	0% (15)	0% (30)	
					3Bet	20% (15)	13% (30)	
Post flop	Total	Flop	Turn	River	Showdowns			
Aggression	2.1	2.6	2.2	1.0	WTSD			
Agg Freq	25%	26%	29% (97)	15% (59)	WWSF			
Check-raise	2% (65)	0% (33)	5% (19)	0% (13)	W\$SD			
Vs missed CB	Bet In position				W\$SD(ex small)			
	46% (41)	47% (38)	33% (3)	--	59% (29)			
	31% (49)	--	31% (49)	--				
Flop As PFR	Total	Regular	3-Bet pot		Turn			
Continuation bet	65% (52)	68% (50)	0% (2)		Continuation bet			
Fold CB to Raise	20% (5)	20% (5)	--		46% (13)			
Fold to Donk Bet	67% (12)	70% (10)	50% (2)		Fold to CB			
Raise Donk Bet	8% (12)	10% (10)	0% (2)					
Vs PFR	Cont bet				River			
Fold to CB	63% (16)	67% (15)	0% (1)		Cont bet			
Raise CB	6% (16)	7% (15)	0% (1)		Fold to CB			
Donk bet	7% (15)-	--						
Steal limped pot 8% (13)								

Keep in mind that you will need to have a fairly big sample size on someone before you can reliably depend on this information. I have over 1600 hands on the player above which is way more than enough. I would recommend at least a hundred hands though. Whereas someone's overall PFR number will usually come close to its true value within 20 hands or so, their PFR by position is going to take quite a bit longer.

As we see above, this player is only playing 6% of his hands from EP and he plays twice that many (12%) from the BTN. As I mentioned before, I think you should be playing at least 3 times as many hands in LP as EP. So at 2 times as many hands from LP this player is somewhat aware of his position at the table. We will need to adjust our calling and 3betting range versus him a fair bit depending on where he raises from.

So let's make some general notes here going off the idea that players are going to open up a little more as they get closer to the button.



Facing an EP Raise

As we saw with the player above, many people will open with a much tighter range from this position. This certainly isn't always the case at the micros. But when somebody opens from this position you should generally give it the most credit. I would especially give it more credit if it is a reg that opened. SLP and fish will usually have no clue about position. They just play their cards wherever. Regs are far more likely to have at least some idea about the importance of position.



Facing an MP Raise

If the raise comes from MP we can expect most players to begin loosening up a bit. As we saw with the player above for instance, his PFR jumps to 8% from these positions. So we can widen our range for most players a little bit when they open from MP.



Facing an LP Raise

If the raise comes from LP then we should put our opponents on an even wider range. LP is of course a common steal spot and players will be more willing to open a wider variety of hands from these positions. We can call lighter. And we can 3bet lighter.

What Hands Should You Call a Preflop Raise With?

Not many. I don't need to talk too much about calling a raise because you shouldn't be doing it very often! This is another common leak of players at these limits. Even though we know that we need to adjust our opponent's range depending on their position, it doesn't mean that we want to be calling them very often.

And this just goes back to the importance of having the initiative in the hand. Calling is a passive play just like limping. It is much more profitable to be in control. **So most of the time when facing a raise we should either be looking to 3bet or fold.**

However, there are some situations where calling a raise preflop is the best option. There are 3 in fact.

1) You have a pocket pair and you want to set mine.

Calling with a small to mid pocket pair in order to set mine is by far the most frequent situation in which I will call a preflop raise. Set mining is incredibly profitable at the micros since most players have a difficult time folding an overpair or top pair type hand.

We don't want to fold these types of hands preflop to a raise too often because they can hit the flop extremely hard and win us a huge pot. However, we don't always want to 3bet with them either because we can't stand a

4bet and we will often have a difficult time winning the pot when called. So calling is sometimes the best option. I will have much more to say about set mining in a bit.

2) You have a big ace or a fairly big pocket pair and don't want to 3bet.

I rarely just call a raise with my big aces (AK, AQ) and I 3bet quite frequently with hands like QQ and JJ as well. But there are a couple situations where calling might be a better option. The most common one by far is when a nit opens in EP. As we discussed above, someone's range is usually at its tightest in EP. And nits are already very tight to begin with. These hands are far too strong to fold preflop. But there doesn't seem to be much incentive to 3bet in this spot either since our opponent's range is so strong. He will just fold all of the worse hands that we want him to stick around with. And he will call or re-raise us with all of the hands that we flip with or that crush us which creates a difficult spot. So calling is often the best option here.

3) You have a speculative hand IP and there is a fish involved in the pot.

And lastly, as mentioned, playing against the fish is of vital importance no matter what stakes you play. These guys lose money at a truly incredible rate and you should go out of your way to get involved in pots with them.

So if I see that a fish is already in the pot I will often call with a wide variety of speculative hands such as suited connectors, suited aces and broadways. On the contrary, I will often fold these hands outright to a raise if there are no fish in the pot. Lastly, I want to be IP at all costs with these types of hands. Therefore I will usually fold if I am in the blinds regardless of who is in the pot.

So just to sum up, if the pot has been opened before me, I am looking to either 3bet or fold the vast majority of the time. And usually fold. I want to have the initiative if at all possible and I have no problem folding some reasonable looking hands if I know that I can't get it.

3bets

This is everybody's favorite topic these days. If there is one area of the game that has changed the most in the past 5 years 3betting is probably a pretty good candidate. "Back in the old days" a 3bet used to mean AA or KK almost exclusively even at much higher stakes. Then people started realizing just how profitable it was to 3bet with some other hands as well. This allowed them to take down the pot right then and there or gain initiative after the flop. And we know how profitable that is.

As more and more people started to notice this and 3betting increased, the obvious counter strategy of 4betting light against habitual 3bettors came about. But even though 4betting light seemed like a good solution, it does have one major drawback. It requires that you risk a fairly large (and almost critical) amount of your stack in order to win the pot. 3betting does not.

This doesn't mean that I think that you should go out and start 3betting up a storm. In fact I am going to argue that you do just the opposite at the micros, especially NL2 and NL5. But 3betting is absolutely a great strategy because it wins you a lot of pots and it is difficult to counter.

Large amounts of 3betting still hasn't really trickled down to the micros just yet however, at least at NL2 and NL5. And usually the people who are 3betting a lot are doing it too much and in the wrong spots. They often don't know **why** they are 3betting. They are just randomly clicking buttons to appear aggressive.

I think that you should be 3betting at the micros for value the large majority of the time. It's ok to toss in the odd light 3bet against the right opponent but it should be the exception rather than the rule. The real key with 3betting is to do it in the right spots and against the right opponents. It's not so much about having certain stats. That said, there is probably still a general range that you should try to keep it within. I 3bet at around 4% in full ring and 5% in 6max.

There are a few reasons why I don't like 3betting too much at these stakes. Firstly, my edge is enormous after the flop a lot of the time. Here are just a few of the mammoth mistakes that almost all players at these limits make on a regular basis.

- Slow playing their overpair
- Betting way too small
- Betting way too big
- Overvaluing their overpair
- Overvaluing their top pair
- Overvaluing a draw

If I am confident that I can outplay my opponent badly much of the time after the flop, artificially inflating the size of the pot and reducing the SPR is not going to help me. When the stacks are deeper, the more highly skilled player is always going to be at an advantage. 3betting inherently reduces SPR, creating shallower stacks, which favors the less skilled player.

If my opponents played more correctly postflop, then there would be much more benefit in just getting more aggressive preflop. This is the case at higher limits and that is why I absolutely advocate a much more liberal 3betting strategy there. But these are the micros and they make awful mistakes postflop all day and twice on Sunday.

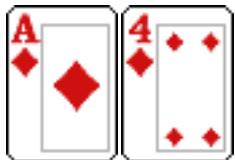
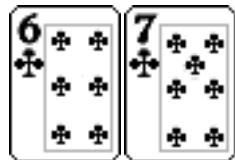
Secondly, one of the biggest leaks that microstakes players have is an inability to fold to 3bets. They also like to call a lot postflop. You can probably see the issue here. The whole point of a 3bet is to try and take down the pot right then and there or on the flop with a bet.

When you just don't have a lot of fold equity against many of your opponents, this really reduces the effectiveness of the play. This isn't a bad thing of course because eventually you will pick up a big hand, 3bet and get called the whole way with it.

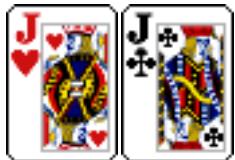
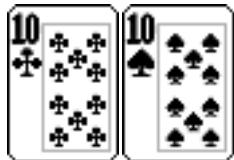
My approach with 3betting is to keep my range polarized. By this I mean, I 3bet the very top of my range. That would be hands such as,



And then I also 3bet a bunch of reasonably decent speculative or high card hands that aren't strong enough to call a raise and are an easy fold to a 4bet. These would be hands like,



I try to stay away from 3betting too much with hands such as,



Although every situation is unique and there are certainly lots of spots where 3betting with them is a no brainer. The biggest reason why I try to avoid 3betting with these hands though in some situations is because they have loads of value but often can't stand a 4bet. They can also put you in all sorts of difficult spots after the flop against players who don't fold much. By calling I keep the pot smaller, keep my decisions simple and give myself the opportunity to outplay them after the flop with a really good starting hand.

The main point here is that my 3betting range is by and large black and white. It mostly has amazing stuff and some fairly junky stuff that can flop huge sometimes. By constructing my range like this, **I don't put myself in difficult spots before or after the flop very often**. Keep things simple. Don't just 3bet for the sake of 3betting.

Light 3betting

Let me say this first. If you never 3bet light at the micros (especially NL2 and NL5) you will be just fine. The large majority of my 3bet range at these stakes is big value hands. As discussed, one of the biggest reasons why you shouldn't 3bet light too much is that they don't fold to them enough. This isn't a terrible thing if they have a high fold to cbet but that usually isn't the case.

Many of your opponents at the micros (even regs) turn into calling stations in 3bet pots and will accidentally correctly call you the whole way with a mid pair if you are in there light trying to barrel them off. However there are occasionally still some good spots to 3bet light. I would look for two conditions.

- You are in position
- They have a high fold to 3bet and/or a high fold to cbet (above 70% in either case)

Make sure you have at least 100 hands on your opponent. And just use the total fold to cbet stat. Fold to cbet in 3bet pots will require too large of a sample most of the time and likely won't be that much different.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes

Player Name	3380 hands 2.44 BB/100						
Won/lost	5m	10m	20m	session			
Time	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0			
Pre-flop	Total	EP	MP	CO	BTN	SB	BB
VP\$IP	19%	18%	21%	19%	20%	25%	13%
Call Open	11%	8%	(49) 9%	15%	10%	10%	12%
Limp	7%	5%	7%	5%	6%	22%	0%
PFR	11%	13%	14%	10%	12%	10%	5%
Raise 1st	19%	14%	20%	22%	37%	44% (64)	--
3-Bet	1%	4%	(49) 3%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Fold to 3B	71% (41)	4-Bet	5% (41)				
Fold to 4B	0% (2)	4B range	0.5% (41)				
Steal (total)	CO	Btn	SB	Vs Steal		SB	BB
31%	22%	37%	44% (64)	Fold	89% (64)	83% (72)	
				Call	11% (64)	15% (72)	
				3Bet	0% (64)	1% (72)	
Post flop	Total	Flop	Turn	River	Showdowns		
Aggression	2.6	2.7	1.9	5.0	WTSD	24%	
Agg Freq	25%	32%	18%	18%	WWSF	35%	
Check-raise	3%	2%	5% (60)	4% (26)	W\$SD	64%	
Vs missed CB					W\$SD(ex small)	66%	(74)
Bet In position	44%	46%	14% (7)	--			
Bet OOP	22%	--	21%	67% (3)			
Flop As PFR	Total	Regular	3-Bet pot		Turn		
Continuation bet	60%	60%	100%(2)		Continuation bet	36% (50)	
Fold CB to Raise	65% (17)	65% (17)	--		Fold to CB	50% (8)	
Fold to Donk Bet	34% (35)	34% (35)	--				
Raise Donk Bet	20% (35)	20% (35)	--		River		
Vs PFR					Cont bet	25% (8)	
Fold to CB	64% (64)	63% (57)	71% (7)		Fold to CB	67% (3)	
Raise CB	5% (64)	5% (57)	0% (7)				
Donk bet	23% (61)-	--					
Steal limped pot	24% (37)						

With either of these two conditions in place you should be able to take down the pot before the flop or after it most of the time. And that really is the whole point. We don't want to be in there with light holdings, especially OOP, against somebody who won't fold.

And like I mentioned before, choose a hand that is too weak to call a raise but has some decent high card or speculative value and is an easy muck to a 4bet. Don't ever 3bet with total trash.

3bet Sizing at NL5

The standard 3bet sizings for 100bb cash games are as follows:

-  **3x the original raise size when you are IP**
-  **4x the original raise size when you are OOP**

These are the sizings that I recommend for NL5 and all higher limits as well.

The reason for the different raise sizes here follows the same line of thinking that was discussed in the section on being OOP with limpers. We want to dissuade them from calling when we are at a positional disadvantage. So by making it a little bit more we expect to get a few less calls. And we create a lower SPR for the times they do call which also works to our advantage.

These are the standard 3bet sizings for 100bb poker because they do a great job at denying our opponents the proper odds to call. There is no way that they can call and expect to turn a profit by folding to our cbet every time they miss. A lot of players at the micros bleed a lot of money over time doing this. I will have more on this in a bit.

3bet Sizing at NL2

At NL2 I would recommend following the same rules as above but using some larger sizings with your premium hands, especially AA and KK. There are two reasons for this.

- Most players in this game call 3bets far too much
- They aren't paying attention to the size of your 3bet

As we discussed before regarding NL2, the level of play at this limit is different than all others and so the same rules do not apply. If your opponent is going to call 5x or 6x just as often as 3x and you have a premium hand, then it logically makes sense to make it the higher amount.

This can be a huge boost to your winrate at this limit as an oversized 3bet can really juice up the size of the pot and allow you to very easily get stacks in postflop.

But this is still very much a player dependant situation. If you are facing a reg for instance, I might make it a more standard amount most of the time. But plenty of bad regs will flip out if you use a ludicrous sizing against them as well. It is certainly profitable against most SLPs and fish however to oversize it.

Please note that stacks sizes do matter quite a bit here regardless of the limit. If your opponent has a stack size that is less than 100bb to start the hand, then it is probably better to just use a standard sizing as there is no point in blowing them off their hand.

Similarly, if they are really short with say 50bb or less, I might just 2.5x or click it back min 3bet. Use some discretion in these situations. The oversized 3bets are geared towards deep stacked play.

One final note on 3bet sizing. If you are squeezing (there was a raise and a call in front of you), then you will need to adjust these numbers upwards a bit. And obviously this applies to any limit as well.

All stack sizes are 100bb or more:

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c.

In the BB you have,

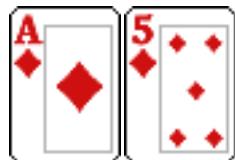


An SLP opens for 15c from MP.

You should 3bet to 4x his raise size = 60c.

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c.

In LP you have,



A TAG (with a 75% fold to 3bet) opens for 15c from MP.

You should 3bet to 3x his raise size = 45c.

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c.

In LP you have,



An SLP opens to 8c from EP.

You should 3bet to 3x his raise size = 24c (or more if you think he will be willing to call more).

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c.

In the BB you have,



A nit opens to 8c from EP.

You should flat call or 3bet (if he has a wide EP range) to 4x his raise size = 32c.

What Should You Do if Somebody 3bets You?

I have found this to be a very popular question especially among my students. As I mentioned above, 3betting has become a lot more popular these days and you will get 3bet with some frequency even at the lowest limits. My answer to this question is pretty simple.

You should be folding a lot of the time especially when you are OOP.

Don't worry if it makes you feel like a wimp. We are here to make money, not massage our egos.

The reason why you should fold a lot of the time when somebody 3bets you is because it simply isn't profitable to call. And just a reminder, I am referring to 100bb stacks here. Things definitely do change quite a bit if the stacks are 50bb or 250bb deep. I don't fold to 3bets anywhere near as much when stacks are really deep. And with shallow stacks, I will fold or 4bet all in with a bit wider range. I am almost never calling.

But back to 100bb poker. It is simply very difficult to turn a profit as a 3bet caller especially when OOP. This is because you are going to miss the flop a lot of the time and have to check/fold and forfeit 10-12bb (your initial raise + the 3bet amount). This adds up in a huge way over time. Do this 9 or 10 times and you have just been stacked!

Even when IP however it is difficult to turn a profit in these situations. Again, this goes back to the profitability of initiative, which we don't have! If you play your cards essentially face up and only get aggressive when you hit the flop decently hard, you simply won't be able to make up for all the times that you missed and folded. You just won't hit the flop and win a big pot often enough.

There is no guarantee that you will get your opponent's stack in the middle when you do hit. A lot of people seem to think that they have infinite implied odds if they hit the flop. This just isn't the case. Your opponent will have plenty of stuff besides AA or KK that will not pay you off.

For all of these reasons, I would suggest that you only call a 3bet with a very strong range such as 88+ and AK/AQ. And obviously with some of the hands on the higher end of this range, you should just be 4betting with them anyways.

What Should You Do if Somebody Min 3bets You?

I just want to say one final thing on this subject of getting 3bet. At the lowest limits, the ones discussed in this book, you will often encounter a situation where you get min 3bet. This is a popular play among bad players. Instead of making a standard 3x or 4x sized 3bet they instead just click it back for the minimum. It is difficult to define their range when they do this and it certainly differs from player to player. It does include a lot of nut hands such as AA and KK, but also a lot of broadways, mid pairs and other random stuff.

In spots like this you should definitely call with a wider range than the one suggested above. However, you must make sure that they have a reasonable stack size as well. Since it is usually bad players that utilize this play, they will be more likely to have a short stack. Bad players tend to buyin short and/or not use the auto top off feature. You should make sure that they have at least 50bb, but preferably a bit more, before considering a call. And you should be much more inclined to call IP than OOP.

If they do not have a large stack and you plan on folding almost every time you miss the flop, you will not be able to turn a profit. Therefore it is better to just fold even though it is such a ridiculous amount. But in general, assuming something close to 100bb stacks, you should be calling these min 3bets a fair bit more often than a normal 3bet.

4bets

4bets are pretty rare at the microstakes with all the passive play but they do happen from time to time. I would strongly advise against any sort of silliness with them.

You should be 4betting with AA and KK only the vast majority of the time in NL2 and NL5 full ring games. And 4betting routinely, but not always, with AK, QQ and JJ in 6max. At levels above NL5 the 4betting game becomes more important and I will regularly be doing it with all of these hands and perhaps a few others on occasion as well.

Do not worry about having a 4bet bluffing range at all until at least NL10.

It is totally unnecessary for your image. Remember you don't need an image at the micros a lot of the time, especially at NL2 and NL5. Nobody is paying any attention. And it is like lighting money on fire due to their narrow 3bet range. Lastly, they will call 4bets routinely and often call down with any piece of the board.

Against all opponents at NL2 and NL5 except maniacs I will pretty much only get two hands in preflop against them for 100bb, AA and KK. Again, at higher limits I will be opening up my range a bit more.

Aggressive TAGs, who I have some history with, might be a slight exception at NL2 and NL5. Sometimes you should get QQ/JJ or AK all in preflop against them as well. But the action also matters a lot here.

Remember our discussion about how ranges change given somebody's position at the table? Assume that a TAG player might be aware of this as well. If he is 3betting your EP open, this is a lot different than if he is 3betting your LP open. This is because he knows that your range is a lot lighter in LP and so therefore he can 3bet you a bit wider and expect to take it down more often. But these situations are still pretty rare at these stakes anyways.

And maniacs, well, they are a different story completely of course but also very rare. I will have a whole section on them later.

But suffice it to say, in general people at the micros do not 4bet much without the nuts. If your 3bet gets re-popped and the stacks were 100bb to start the hand, you should be folding the large majority of the time.

At higher limits of course (by NL25 for sure), QQ, JJ and AK are fistpump preflop jams most of the time. Not so at lower stakes, unless you hate money of course. And if I am really deep against a nit I might even pitch KK to a big 4bet. You can't write a poker book without talking about when to fold KK preflop though so there will be a section on that later as well.

4bet Sizing

The standard sizing for a 4bet at NL5 and higher is 2.5x your opponent's 3bet.

This allows you to make a raise small enough to possibly still get away from your hand. But since we nearly always have a nut range anyways, this is really just an illusion to induce action. There is no need to put in a massive 4bet since a normal sized one represents such a large portion of a stack already.

At NL2, I would make it a little bit more, maybe 3x, just because they will call it more often. Or sometimes I will just go all in as that looks bluffy to them. At both limits I will certainly adjust my sizing upwards a little bit if the stacks are really deep. On the flip side, if the stacks are considerably less than 100bb I will probably just click it back or shove.

But in general this stuff isn't really that big of a deal since you shouldn't be making very many 4bets at the micros in the first place.

All stacks below are 100bb deep:

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c.

In LP you have,



A Nit opens to 8c from MP and you make it 24c.

He 4bets to 60c.

You should fold in FR and sometimes jam in 6max.

Example: Blinds are 1c/2c.

In LP you have,



An SLP opens to 6c from MP and you make it 24c.

He min 4bets.

You should go all in.

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c.

In LP you have,



You raise it to 15c.

A TAG (with a 6% 3bet) makes it 50c from the SB.

You should 4bet to \$1.25 and call a shove.

Postflop

Now let's get down to business. As I said before while preflop play is reasonably important, the real money is won (or lost) in no limit hold'em after the flop. And quite frankly, I think postflop play is just a lot more interesting.

If there is one thing that we know by now it is this.

At the micros your opponents will often make horrific mistakes after the flop.

This is probably the single biggest reason why it is possible to maintain an absurd winrate at these stakes. They will routinely bet far too little (or not at all) when they should be making a big bet. They will fire again and again or even overbet when they shouldn't be betting at all. They will regularly call or raise when they should be folding. And they will often fold when they should be calling or raising. You get the idea. They do a lot of stuff completely backwards!

Fish make these kinds of mistakes no matter what limit they are playing. The great thing about the micros however is that many of the regs and SLPs make these same mistakes as well.

Hand Strengths

Before I get started though, I need to talk a little bit about hand strengths and assessing a board. Being able to quickly determine how your two hole cards connect with the community cards is one of the most important and basic tools that you need to have as a poker player. And it is something that a lot of newer players struggle with.

This goes beyond knowing what beats what though. Everybody knows that. You need to really understand the relative value of different types of hands. This can change depending on what type of game you are playing.

In limit hold'em for instance, with the structured bet sizes, top pair type hands have a lot more value because the potential payoff for someone chasing a draw just isn't that big. But it's a whole different ballgame in no limit because of the large stack sizes and the ability to bet it all at any time. This brings up the value of speculative hands and brings down the value of top pair type hands.

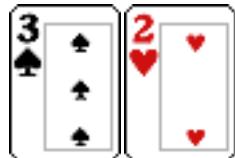
So it is important that you clearly understand the relative value of different hand types before I really get into the nuts and bolts of postflop play at the micros.

No Pair Hands

Let's start with the worst type of hand that you can have; a no pair hand. This is actually the most common hand that you will have. If you do not have a pair before the flop, you will still not have a pair the majority of the time after the flop. This concept alone really cuts to the core of what it takes to be successful in no limit hold'em. Always remember that most of the time, nobody actually has much of anything.

Under no circumstances can you turn most of these types of hands into winners at the micros. There are a wide variety of different no pair hands from,

Example:

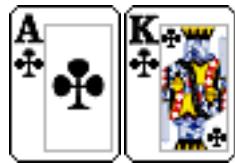


on,

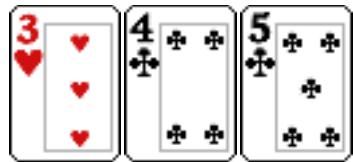


for three high with no draw where you beat absolutely nothing to,

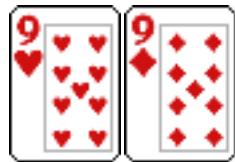
Example:



on,



for the nut no pair with a flush and straight draw. You are actually a sizeable favorite (over 60%) against a lot of made hands such as,



or



But the facts remain the same. You aren't going to win in the long run with these types of hands unless you have a monster like in the last example. So for the most part you should just give up or check it down. There are some exceptions, which I will talk about later, but in general, these are garbage hands. And you want to put the least amount of money in the pot as possible with them.

Pair Hands

Most of the time with one pair hands, it is going to be a good idea to play a fairly small pot as well. While these hands have much more value than no pair hands, you still won't win much with them in the long run. And as with no pair hands there is a wide range of paired hands.

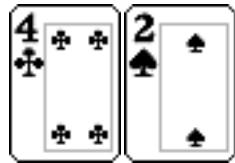
Example:



on,



for top pair top kicker (TPTK) down to,



On that same board for bottom pair, no kicker.

You should only be getting involved with top pair hands most of the time at the micros. There are some exceptions of course but by and large you should be giving up or exercising pot control with all of your middle and bottom pairs.

Even with your top pair hands, against all but the biggest of fish, you will routinely want to employ some kind of pot control, often by checking the turn or river. That said, a top pair top kicker hand has a lot more value than a regular top pair hand and should be played quite a bit stronger. But it will be difficult to get three streets of value in either case.

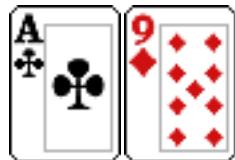
And it's pretty easy to see why this is the case. When you have top pair, it's hard for somebody else to have top pair as well because you hold one of those cards in your hand. When you have a set or an overpair it is easier for your opponent to have top pair and delude themselves into feeling really good about it. Don't make that mistake yourself! For the most part, top pair hands need to be played with some caution.

Two Pair

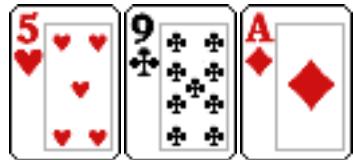
With two pair hands we are finally getting into the territory of stuff that we can play strongly. While not all two pair hands are created equal, most of the time you should be playing them very aggressively and often for stacks. The reason is pretty simple; it is hard for your opponent to have better. In fact a lot of the time if they do happen to have something better, it is just a cooler.

Example:

You have,



The flop comes,



If they happen to have,



here for instance this is just a cooler. We are going to lose our stack or a big portion of it every time. There are just far too many other hands that they can be overvaluing here such as a worse two pair or an ace. 55 simply represents the absolute top of their range. The great thing about poker however is that the shoe will always be on the other foot one day and they will go broke here against you as well.

But there are some other two pair spots where playing an enormous pot probably isn't in our best interest.

Example:

In the BB you have,



The flop comes,



There is no reason to play a huge pot here, especially if there are a lot of people involved. In fact I would almost always play this hand very cautiously. There are so many more hands that can beat us (compared to the previous example) such as a flush and higher two pairs. Our hand looks fairly good but it is difficult to get a lot of good action. That is, we are not nearly as likely to play a big pot here against something that we crush like in the last example.

So you will definitely have to use some discretion in two pair spots. However most of the time when you have two pair you should be playing it really strong. You shouldn't be pot controlling the turn or river anywhere near as much with these types of hands.

Set/Trips

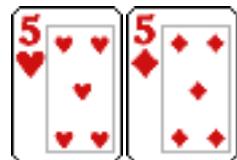
Now we really get into the types of hands that are of huge importance at the micros in general. It can often seem like poker at the micros is just a waiting game much of the time. Pull the handle on the slot machine, flop something huge and win a massive pot. That isn't an entirely true depiction but it isn't an entirely false one either especially in full ring

It is important to make a clear distinction between these hands and everything listed before. Two pair is a bit of a gray area but 3 of a kind or better is where the big money is made in this game.

What is a Set?

Now before I talk about how to play these kinds of hands I need to talk about what they are first. I know this might seem silly to some but I have seen a lot of newer players who get confused about the difference between a set and trips. They are not the same. Not at all.

Example:

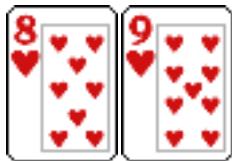


on,

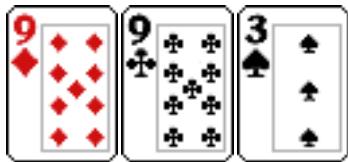


is a set.

Example:



on,



is trips.

There is a big difference between these two hands. A set is a much stronger hand for a couple reasons.

Firstly, a set is a lot better hidden than trips. On the 993 board, if you start raising and going nuts, it is pretty obvious to your opponent what you are trying to represent, the 9. On the 952 board however it will be much harder for him to see exactly what you are claiming to have. He will be much more likely to assume that you are just overplaying some 9x type hand.

Secondly, a set can't be outkicked. In the first example above there is only one hand that can currently beat us on that board, 99. Whereas on the second board there are actually six hands that can currently beat us, 33, A9, K9, Q9, J9 and T9.

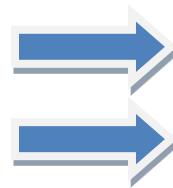
Trips is a powerful hand and should be played aggressively most of the time, but strictly speaking when I talk about set mining in the next section, I am talking about a pocket pair making a set.

Set Mining 101

Set mining plays a big role at the micros, especially in full ring. It is basically the act of calling a raise with a small or middle pair in the hopes of flopping a set. You will be doing it a lot because it is very profitable.

I have seen countless times in HEM and other database programs over the years that pairs make up around 90% of my profit. Just think about that for a second, 90%! And non-premium pairs make up nearly half of those profits. So it is very important to play these hands correctly.

You need to keep a couple of things in mind when set mining in order to maximize your profitability. I see a lot of mistakes being made, especially by regulars in this area. Here are the two main things.



- If your intention is to set mine then you need to do exactly that. If you miss your set, it's time to fold.
- You need to have the correct odds to set mine profitably.

The first one is a big area of spew for some people. It is very important to have a plan for a hand. And when set mining this should be a very simple one. **Most of the time in full ring, regardless of your opponent's player**

type, when you call with a small or medium pocket pair and don't either flop a set or an open ended straight draw, you should fold. In 6max it is mostly the same but we will be continuing a little bit more often since ranges are a bit wider in that game.

This seems simple enough, but a lot of people like to get themselves into all sorts of awful situations by throwing the plan out the window and doing some silly stuff on the fly. Make a plan and stick with it.

And the second point requires some more discussion as well. Hitting a set does not happen anywhere near as much as we would like it to. It will happen roughly 1 in 8.5 times. So your pocket pair will be unimproved after the flop the vast majority of the time. That's a lot of 3x or 4x bb's to be giving up if you are going to be folding to a cbet most of the time when you miss. So you need to know that you are going to get adequately paid off when you finally do hit.

Look for players who are very tight and who you think might have a hard time folding an overpair. But more importantly look at the stack sizes. I like to have at least 15 to 1 on my opponent's stack and even more if I am OOP.

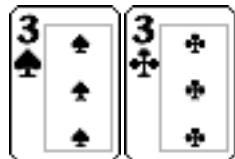
By 15 to 1 I mean that **my opponents stack size represents at least 15 times the size of the raise that I am calling**. As a rough rule of thumb this equates to them having 50bb or more to start the hand. Most raises are 3bb or 4bb so let's just use an average raise size of 3.5bb. $3.5\text{bb} \times 15 = 52.5\text{bb}$.

There are several reasons for this. At a first glance one would think that we only need about 8.5 to 1 to profitably set-mine. After all, those are our odds against flopping a set right? This is wrong. And there are several reasons why.

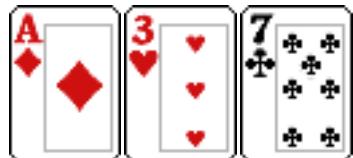
Firstly, you aren't going to get paid off every single time you hit your set even if your opponent started with a premium hand. For instance,

Example:

You have,



The flop comes,



You hit your set, awesome! But if your opponent has,



he may grudgingly make the fold at some point in the hand figuring you for an ace.

Also, there will be many times when you will flop a set on a raggedy low board and your opponent has an unpaired hand like,



or,



and won't pay you off either. In fact, this will happen a lot. It is always important to remember that there are many more combinations of unpaired off-suit hands than paired hands. You can actually see this in HEM by going to the "Preflop Cards" tab and choosing "All Cards" in the Quick Filters.

Known Cards													
AA	AKs	ADs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s	
0.47%	0.31%	0.31%	0.30%	0.29%	0.31%	0.30%	0.31%	0.29%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s	
0.92%	0.45%	0.29%	0.29%	0.29%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.32%	0.29%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.31%
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s	
0.91%	0.91%	0.45%	0.31%	0.31%	0.30%	0.31%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.31%	0.31%	0.30%
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s	
0.88%	0.90%	0.92%	0.46%	0.30%	0.30%	0.31%	0.30%	0.31%	0.30%	0.29%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s	
0.90%	0.92%	0.91%	0.88%	0.47%	0.30%	0.30%	0.31%	0.31%	0.31%	0.29%	0.31%	0.31%	0.31%
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s	
0.89%	0.91%	0.91%	0.89%	0.91%	0.45%	0.30%	0.32%	0.31%	0.31%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.31%
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s	
0.89%	0.91%	0.90%	0.91%	0.91%	0.90%	0.45%	0.30%	0.31%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s	
0.90%	0.88%	0.91%	0.91%	0.90%	0.89%	0.90%	0.45%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s	
0.89%	0.90%	0.91%	0.92%	0.91%	0.90%	0.92%	0.92%	0.45%	0.30%	0.31%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s	
0.91%	0.91%	0.90%	0.92%	0.91%	0.89%	0.88%	0.91%	0.89%	0.45%	0.31%	0.31%	0.30%	0.30%
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s	
0.90%	0.90%	0.90%	0.91%	0.92%	0.91%	0.87%	0.90%	0.88%	0.90%	0.44%	0.31%	0.31%	0.30%
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s	
0.90%	0.90%	0.89%	0.90%	0.92%	0.92%	0.89%	0.91%	0.91%	0.89%	0.91%	0.45%	0.31%	0.31%
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22	
0.92%	0.92%	0.90%	0.92%	0.94%	0.88%	0.92%	0.90%	0.89%	0.89%	0.90%	0.92%	0.45%	

QQ,KK,AA,AK Frequency: 2.6%

As you can see above, you will get dealt AKo for instance about twice as often as AA or KK. So even if your opponent started with a premium range, you must remember that AK or AQ will show up much more often than big pairs. And since the odds of flopping a pair or better with two unpaired hole cards are only around 1 in 3, plenty of the time your opponent will have just ace high when you finally hit your set.

Also, it is always important to remember that even if your opponent has an overpair and you have a set, he will hit his 2 outer or a running flush a small amount of the time to win the pot as well. An overpair is never drawing dead against a set.

Finally, there are a couple more situations that will happen from time to time that will freeze both of you such as a 4 or 5 card straight on the board or a 4 or 5 card flush which neither of you have a piece of.

So with all of these factors combined it should be pretty clear why you need your opponent to have a much bigger stack size than you may think in order to profitably set mine. As I said, 50bb or more is probably a decent rule of thumb.

When you are OOP will you need to be even more conservative with your set mining attempts. This is because the whole point of hitting your set is being able to extract the maximum value with it. And as we know, one of the biggest reasons why playing IP is so much more profitable than playing OOP is that it is a lot easier to bet and get called.

When you hit your set OOP your opponent is always going to get to see what you do first and make his decision from there. He can foil your check/raise attempt by simply checking behind himself. If you miss a betting round it is going to be much harder to get all the money in by the river.

Conversely if you lead he can also dash your plans for a big pot by choosing to pot control or even just fold. So as a rule of thumb for set mining OOP, you should make sure your opponent has an even bigger stack size, 70bb or more. If there are other players in the pot who you think will pay you off then you don't need to be quite so rigid with these requirements though.

Remember that it is perfectly fine also to simply fold your pair preflop (especially the small ones) if you don't think it will show a positive expectation in the long run. Or you can 3bet with them to regain the initiative and give yourself more ways to win the pot. This is often the best course of action when you are OOP. Remember to keep your opponent's range in mind however. We don't want to be 3betting our pocket 4's against a nit that opened from EP or against most players for that matter. However, it is profitable to 3bet when they open in LP.

Overpairs

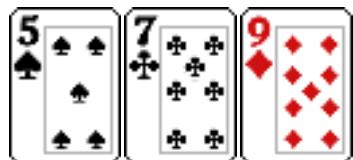
Your other main profit source at the micros will come from overpairs and especially the top end ones. In the last section I mentioned that your pairs will make up around 90% of your overall profit. Well of that 90% AA and KK will account for nearly half of it alone. So it kind of goes without saying that it is extremely important to play these two hands optimally.

In general you should be playing a lot of big pots with them. However I will go much more into specifics later. I think the concept of an overpair is pretty straightforward. For instance,

Example:

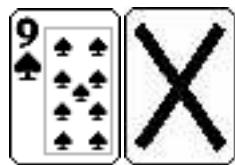


on,

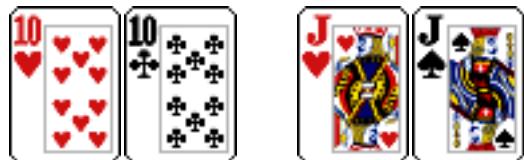


is an overpair to the board.

As was discussed earlier, you should value these hands quite a bit more than a top pair hand. Because with an overpair there are more hands that you can beat. And the likelihood of them having a top pair hand is higher since you don't have one of those cards in your hand. For instance in the above example we can beat all the,



one pair hands as well as two overpairs,



If we had a top pair hand here instead we would have to worry about being outkicked as well as these over overpairs. So an overpair is just a statistically better hand than a top pair hand and therefore you should play it more aggressively. This doesn't mean that you shouldn't hit the pot control gear against some players on some turn and river cards, but overall you should be less likely to do so.

Monsters

In this category I lump together all of the hands that are four of a kind or greater. Obviously you will make one of these hands so rarely that they are hardly worth talking about. But there are a few things to say. The correct play with them at any level is to slowplay. You are so far ahead of everyone else in the hand that the only sensible thing to do is to check and hope that they make something decent by the river. If a major draw comes in on the river I have had a lot of success by overbetting or just shoving. I will provide some specific examples of that later.

The Flop

This is the most important street in hold'em in my opinion. Many people might argue that the turn or river offer more critical decisions. And they are right in a sense. But at the micros most hands that go beyond the flop with additional betting are big hands which sort of play themselves. The flop sets up everything else that happens in the hand and is the source of either massive spew or massive profit. Let's see if we can make sure that you are strongly in the latter category.

Planning Out a Hand

Before I continue on with anything else I want to discuss a broad topic that I feel is very important; planning out a hand. This section could have gone in a lot of different places in this book. You should be doing some planning preflop for instance. But as I just said, I believe that the flop is kind of the control center for everything in the hand. The majority of your planning should take place here and that is why I want to talk about this now.

One of the best habits that you can develop for your game is to view each hand as a whole rather than focus on an individual street. No limit hold'em is usually played 100bb deep and this of course creates the opportunity for multiple streets of betting. With shallower stack sizes like in tournament play for example, there often isn't enough firepower for multiple betting rounds. So this concept doesn't apply quite so much.

However in 100bb cash games we need to remember that the big money goes into the pot on the later streets. If we make poor decisions on earlier streets, we could pay dearly for it later. It is very much a snowball effect.

So the main idea here is to make your decisions for later streets before you actually get to them. And you should do this on the flop. If you choose to go beyond the flop then you should be ok with potentially playing a

big pot. Don't call or raise the flop if that is not your intention. If your intention is to play a small pot and your opponent is raising and won't let you, then you should fold.

Whichever path you choose is fine. Just don't choose the gray one. Choose black or white. Don't say things to yourself like "I will call and see what happens." Instead say things like "I am going to call the flop with the intention of betting or raising the turn on X, Y and Z cards. Or, I will call the turn and river for value as long as A, B or C cards don't come."

See the difference between these two sets of statements? The latter ones shows purpose and clarity. The former is just tossing in money and hoping for the best.

I want to be absolutely clear though.

In general when facing aggression at the micros you should simply fold right then and there the vast majority of the time.

But I will get into all of this in much more detail shortly. The main point of this section should be clear though. Make a plan for the hand on the flop and stick with it throughout the hand.

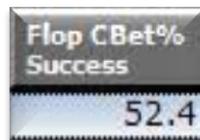
Cbetting

So thus far I have discussed the starting hand requirements by position and the best strategy for entering the pot. I also discussed how to evaluate the strength of your hand on the flop. So how should you proceed from there?

Well as you no doubt guessed, I think you should be continuation betting (cbetting) much of the time in order to keep up the aggression. **I would recommend that you make a cbet about 75% of the time in fact.**

Cbetting should be a big part of your game. If you follow the advice listed earlier about raising preflop a lot, then you are going to go to the flop as the aggressor most of the time. You should follow that up most of the time with some more aggression. You don't want to give your opponent any reason to believe that you are weak or that he can have any control in the hand.

Cbetting is such a powerful tool because it simply works. In HEM you can check your cbet success rate in the "reports" tab. These are my results over that same 700k hand sample at NL2 that I have been referring to throughout this book.



So as you can see, even at NL2 they do fold a decent amount of the time. Without doing any sort of complex math we can quickly determine that if we make a pot sized cbet 100% of the time, then we would be right around breakeven. Half of the time they would fold and forfeit the pot to us, and half of the time they would call or raise.

However, it is not advisable that you bet the size of the pot every single time. That is complete overkill in many spots as a much smaller bet will yield the same result; getting them to fold. Sometimes you will only need to bet as little as 50% of the pot or so in order to take it down.

Also, just because our cbet gets called or raised does not mean that we will lose the pot every single time. We are playing "tight" and aggressive here after all. This means that our range will be strong a fair amount of the time. There is a reason why we raised preflop and we will still win the pot plenty of times just on the strength of our hand. So for all of these reasons, cbetting is a very powerful tool.

Perceived Ranges

Before I get started on when to cbet and what sizings to use I want to briefly talk about something called a perceived range. This is a very important concept to keep in mind especially as you head to the flop. After the preflop action has taken place there are 2 perceived ranges: ours and our opponent's.

These ranges are referred to as “perceived” because they represent a certain set of hands that someone is **assumed** to have. This isn’t always the case of course as nothing in poker is absolute. This range revolves around perceptions and beliefs however. What someone actually has isn’t that important. It’s what other people think that person has that matters.

In general when somebody makes a preflop raise most people will immediately assign them big cards, especially broadway ones, or big pairs such as,

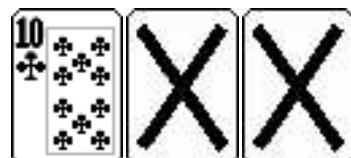
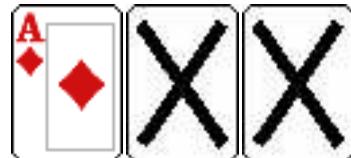


or



In a nutshell they will give you a lot of credit. Often too much. In reality, we know that we are raising with all sorts of suited connectors and small pairs and such as well. But that doesn't matter. **What they think** we have is all that matters.

So the types of boards that hit our perceived range the hardest are ones like,



With the X referring to ANY card.

It should be noted that the Axx and Kxx boards are probably the best flops of all for us as they are the scariest ones for our opponents.

Other boards that are good for us to cbet are paired ones such as,

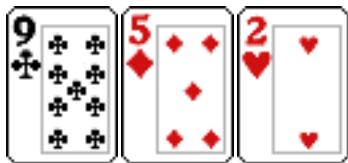


or



These are great boards to fire at because they are very hard to hit. And even though these boards don't contain any broadway cards, remember that our perceived range has lots of big pairs in it that don't need to improve anyways.

And so the same line of thinking goes for a whole host of other raggedy, uncoordinated boards such as,

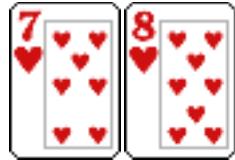
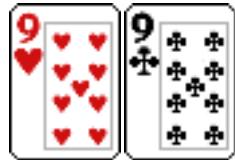
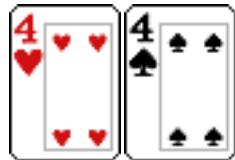


or

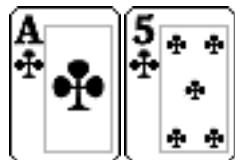


So as you can see, the boards that are good to cbet, are in fact, most boards. That is why I advocated cbetting about 75% of the time. Now let's go over the bad ones.

So far I have only discussed the perceived range of the preflop raiser. What about the caller? When somebody calls a preflop raise their perceived range is small pairs, middle pairs, suited connectors and suited aces. Hands like,



or



The first thing that jumps out here is that there aren't very many broadway cards in this range. And the ones that do show up are usually weak with no kicker and therefore can't stand a lot of heat. The majority of this range is made up of small and middle cards. Again, this is simply a perceived range. People will certainly show up with some hands that are outside of this range from time to time.

The kinds of boards that hit the perceived range of a preflop caller the hardest are ones like,



or

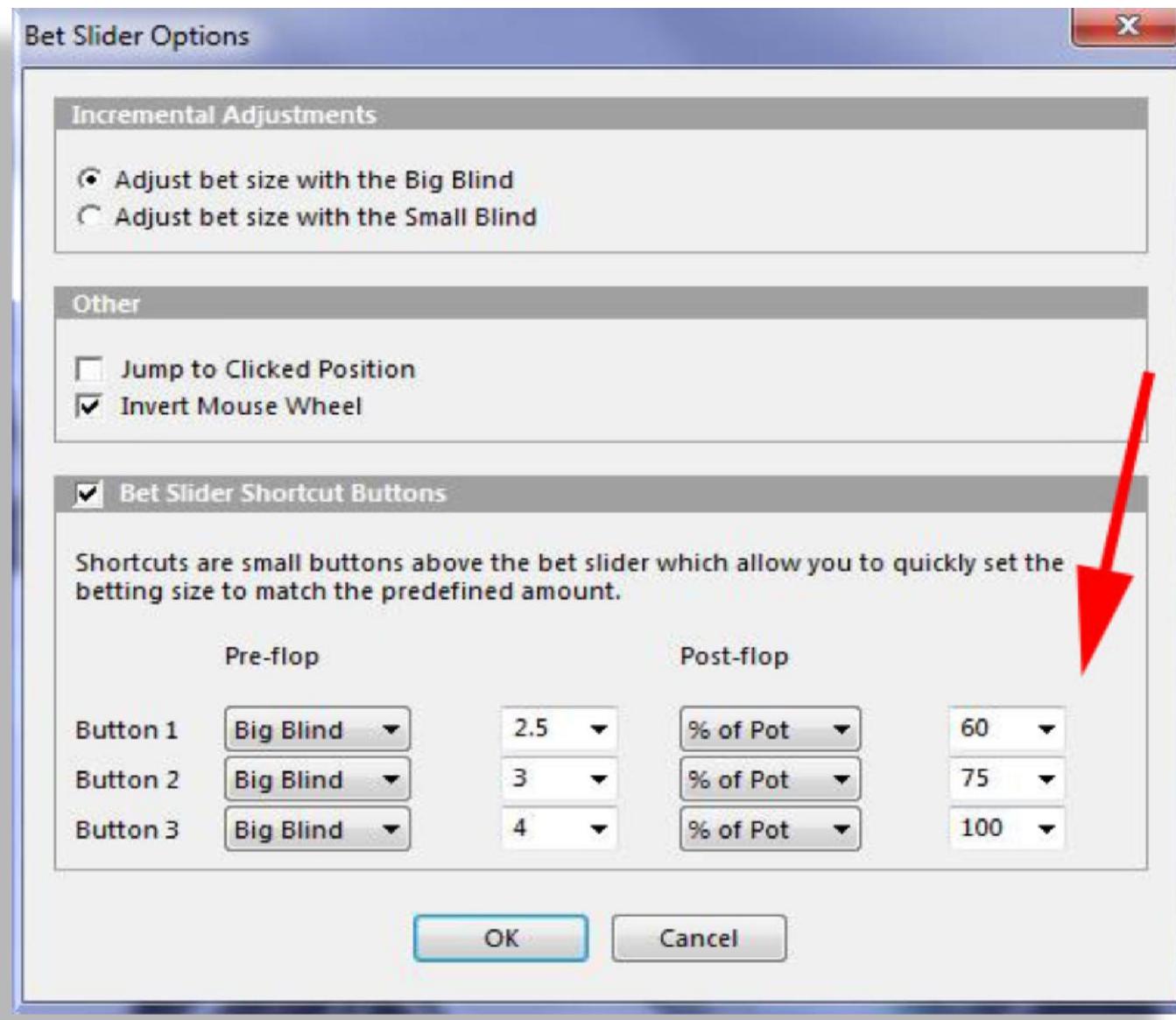


These boards are highly coordinated, with a lot of small and middle cards and a flush draw.

Cbet Amounts

At the micros I use 3 different cbet sizings. You do not have to use these exact cbet amounts but I have found that they work fairly well. If you use a software tool like table ninja, then you will be able to have a preset amount show up in the bet box. However, it might only limit you to a single bet sizing. I just make use of Pokerstars custom bet buttons as shown below.

➤ Options ➤ Bet Slider Options ➤



Before I go into the numbers I want to briefly go over why I use several different cbet amounts. As I alluded to earlier, at the micros I work off the assumption that people in general aren't really paying that much attention to little subtleties like how much I am betting. They are often viewing my actions more in the black and white sense of bet made or bet not made. Almost like it is in limit hold'em.

At higher limits a common topic of discussion is "balance" or "balancing your range." Balance refers to having a wide range in any given situation by making the same action with your air, mediocre and monster hands. This is an important part of your game at these limits because players are much more acutely focused on many aspects of your play. And you don't want to give anything away about the strength of your hand.

At the micros this just isn't the case though, especially at NL2 and NL5. There isn't enough money involved for most people to care, and they aren't thinking along these terms yet anyways. So I think that you should absolutely exploit this by betting large when you have it and betting small when you don't. At NL10 and higher I would advocate standardizing all of your bets sizes though as your opponents may begin to start paying more attention. Using staggered bet sizings against bad players is fine at any limit though.

No Cbet

I should actually start off with the rare case where I don't make a cbet at all. I think you should be cbetting around 75% of the time at the micros so this shouldn't happen too often. However, the situation where I don't cbet is usually one where I am OOP against a fish or SLP and the flop comes with one of those coordinated, wet boards that hits their perceived range and I have no piece of it.

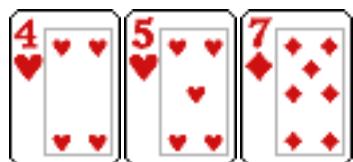
By no piece I mean two overs or an underpair at best. Basically anything that has very little chance to improve and has very little strength right now as well. And I say against fish and SLPs specifically because on average they will have the lowest fold to cbet% of any player type. Here are a few examples of this.

Example:

I am OOP with,

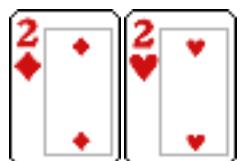


And the flop comes,



Example:

I am OOP with,



And the flop comes,



I don't expect to get folds very often on these types of boards against most players because it smacks their perceived range. I expect to get even fewer folds against bad players who often have a low fold to cbet%. And lastly, I don't have much equity in the hand.

I will also often check these types of boards when OOP against an active TAG or maniac player type as well. These are the two player types that will play back at you more often than any other. Against these types of players it is usually better to just check and fold in these spots and not waste a cbet.

So for all of these reasons I think the most "profitable" thing to do in these situations is to just check/fold against most opponents. Now if they bet some silly amount like the minimum, or double minimum, as will often happen at the micros, I am not folding. So I should say instead that my intention here is to fold to any reasonable sized bet. And by reasonable I mean anything roughly 1/3 pot or more.

If they check behind however, I may take a shot at the pot on some turn cards, especially the ones that improve my hand or hit my perceived range. I will discuss that more in the turn section.

Delayed Cbetting

There is one other situation where I will often choose not to make a cbet. But it is not because I don't like my hand or am giving up. It is because I have a mediocre hand that can't stand a raise. Usually my intention here will be to turn the hand into a two street game and bet the turn and possibly the river depending on which cards come.

Example:

I have,



And the flop comes,



Example:

I have,



And the flop comes,



In both of these situations I may choose not to cbet especially if I am up against one of the aggressive player types. This doesn't mean that I am giving up if they bet though. I will usually just call.

60%

This is my smallest cbet sizing. I cbet this amount when the flop hasn't really improved my hand. However, the key difference here from before is that I catch a flop which hits my perceived range, not theirs. But I will also bet this amount on the boards that hit their perceived range as long as I am IP. When I am OOP on those flops, I check/fold, as we saw in the last section.

While I still don't expect to get a ton of folds on the boards that hit their perceived range, I am in a much better spot being IP for many of the reasons that were discussed earlier.

- They have shown weakness
- We get to control the size of the pot

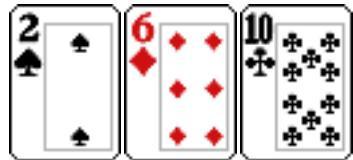
So here are a few examples both IP and OOP where I will cbet 60%,

Example:

I am OOP with,



And the flop comes,



Example:

I am OOP with,

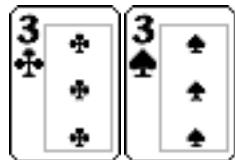


And the flop comes,

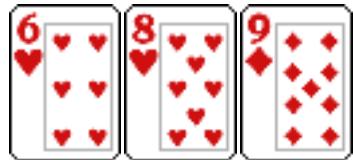


Example:

I am IP with,



And the flop comes,



Example:

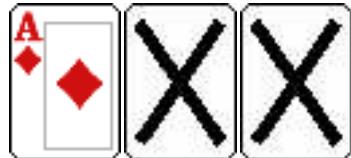
I am IP with,



And the flop comes,



As a side note I will often bet even less (50-55%) when I catch a



or



flop and I have nothing. And especially when both X's are lower rag type cards and there is no flush draw.

As I mentioned earlier, these are the kinds of flops that will be the scariest for our opponents because they nail our perceived range the hardest. You will often get lots of quick folds on them because it represents a way ahead/way behind situation for them. All of their small pairs, middle pairs and suited connectors are drawing very thin if we actually have the top pair that we are representing. And so therefore, we can often get away with an even smaller bet than usual since they are folding with such a high frequency anyways.

And just as a final note, I will also cbet on the smaller side in 3bet pots when I miss (50-55%) due to the lower SPR. Also, they are often going to fold to a bigger bet just as often as a smaller one so I may as well make it the lesser of the two when I don't have much of a hand.

75%

I bet this amount mostly against sticky regs when I have a good to great hand. It doesn't matter whether I am OOP or IP. What is a sticky reg? A sticky reg is a nit or TAG that doesn't fold to cbets very often (60% or less). Against these types of players I prefer to bet a little more with my good hands to make them pay for this. When I have nothing I will of course bet 60%.

So here are a few common situations where I will cbet 75% of the pot.

Example:

I have,



And the flop comes,

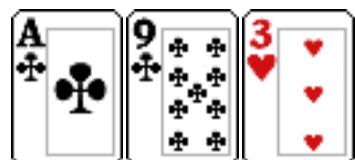


Example:

I have,

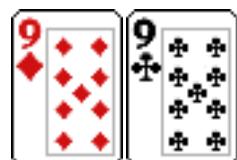


And the flop comes,

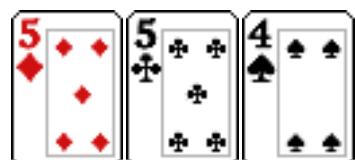


Example:

I have,



And the flop comes,



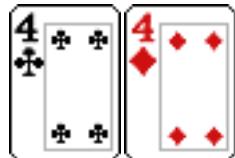
100%

I bet 100% of the pot against bad players and even some regs when I have a very strong hand like TPTK or better. It doesn't matter if I am IP or OOP. By bad players I mean SLP and fish. These players do not like to fold and are often only paying attention to the strength of their own hand. There is no need to keep anything balanced here. If they have some piece, then they are going to call. If they don't, they will fold. So we may as well go for the maximum when we have something good.

Here are a few examples of spots where I will cbet full pot,

Example:

I have,

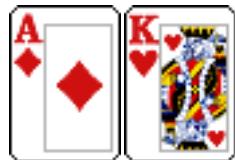


And the flop comes,

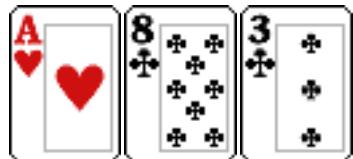


Example:

I have,



And the flop comes,

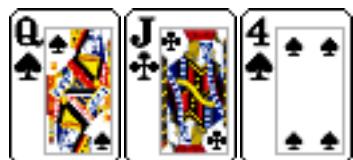


Example:

I have,



And the flop comes,



Over-Cbetting

I have experimented widely with over-cbetting at NL2 with big hands against bad players. That is, betting more than 100%. I have worked a lot with 125% and 150% for instance. I am unclear on the results as it is difficult to quantify. There are definitely situations where I do believe that it is more profitable than a standard bet however. There are certain players who will not fold for any amount, especially if you have been winning a lot of pots off of them as of late. Always remember that this is no limit hold'em and you aren't bound by any rules.

One particular spot where bad players will not fold is on a bingo board such as,



They absolutely hate to fold almost anything on this flop and if they have a pair, they are not going anywhere for any amount. So I will often overbet cbet here with TT+. This gets more money in the middle before a scare card potentially kills my action. It also allows me to get deeper stacks in the middle by the river.

Donked Into?!?

A popular play especially among bad players is to lead into the preflop raiser on the flop. This is usually a small bet and it obviously goes against the flow of the action. You will routinely encounter these kinds of bets at the micros so it is important to spend some time talking about how to proceed against them. These types of bets can mean a lot of different things depending on the player type. The first thing that I usually do is check the full popup in HEM,

Crushing The Microstakes

Player Name		223 hands										
Lost \$0.50		-11.43 BB/100										
Time	5m	10m	20m	session								
Won/lost	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0								
Pre-flop	Total	EP	MP	CO	BTN	SB	BB					
VP\$IP	34%	26%	(54)	27% (44)	26% (31)	35% (31)	61% (31)	34% (29)				
Call Open	22% (60)	0%	(2)	0% (9)	0% (13)	0% (7)	46% (13)	44% (16)				
Limp	3%	2%	(52)	3% (34)	0% (16)	4% (23)	12% (17)	0% (11)				
PFR	25%	24%	(54)	25% (44)	26% (31)	32% (31)	35% (31)	7% (29)				
Raise 1st	35%	22%	(50)	26% (23)	60% (10)	54% (13)	70% (10)	--				
3-Bet	2% (60)	0%	(2)	0% (9)	8% (13)	0% (7)	0% (13)	0% (16)				
Fold to 3B	50% (8)	4-Bet		0% (8)								
Fold to 4B	--	4B range	0.0%	(8)								
Steal (total)	CO	Btn	SB	Vs Steal			SB	BB				
61% (33)	60% (10)	54% (13)	70% (10)	Fold			50% (4)	33% (6)				
				Call			50% (4)	67% (6)				
				3Bet			0% (4)	0% (6)				
Post flop	Total	Flop	Turn	River								
Aggression	1.7	1.8	2.2	0.3	Showdowns							
Agg Freq	29%	45% (65)	27% (44)	3% (34)	WTSD							
Check-raise	0% (20)	0% (12)	0% (4)	0% (4)	WWSF							
Vs missed CB					WSSD							
Bet In position	31% (13)	31% (13)	--	--	WSSD(ex small)							
Bet OOP	30% (23)	--	33% (21)	0% (2)	47% (19)							
Flop As PFR	Total	Regular	3-Bet pot									
Continuation bet	58% (26)	58% (26)	--	Turn								
Fold CB to Raise	0% (2)	0% (2)	--	Continuation bet								
Fold to Donk Bet	0% (7)	0% (7)	--	Fold to CB								
Raise Donk Bet	43% (7)	43% (7)	--									
Vs PFR				River								
Fold to CB	57% (7)	60% (5)	50% (2)	Cont bet								
Raise CB	0% (7)	0% (5)	0% (2)	Fold to CB								
Donk bet	45% (11)			--								
Steal limped pot	0%	(1)										

In the above example you can see that this particular player is donk betting 45% of the time. As I mentioned during the HUD section, you always need to be aware of the sample size when interpreting stats. You are probably going to need at least 100 hands before using this stat. In this particular case we will be just fine.

Somebody who is donk betting at 45% has a pretty wide range of hands. We know that on average, you are only going to make a pair or better on the flop around 33% of the time. This player is betting with a considerably higher frequency than that. He is going to have plenty of weak hands in his range here. So I would probably raise in this spot a lot of the time. It should be noted that you don't have to raise that much. Usually a donk bet is small anyways, such as 1/4 pot, so you could just 3x it and get the desired effect.

Also, it's a good idea to have some sort of equity when you raise their donk bet even if it is as weak as a gutshot or two overs. This is because while you will get a lot of folds by raising, you will still get called by all of their draws and paired hands. It is nice to be able to check down ace high for the win or at least have 6 outs to best them on later streets.

Multiple Opponents

I should briefly talk about what to do when there are two or more opponents on the flop. This will happen a fair bit at the micros. It's tough to say exactly what I would do in every situation but in general my standards for cbetting go up quite a bit. I need to have something fairly good. At least an 8 out draw or top pair for instance (I will usually delay cbet my middle pairs). So even if the flop comes with a board that is favorable to my perceived range, I will choose not to cbet most of the time if I have nothing. With two or more opponents there is double the chance that somebody has something. You need to tone it down quite a bit.

After the Cbet

As I mentioned previously, my cbet success rate is around 50%. But that means that I get called or raised around 50% of the time as well. How should you proceed when this happens?

What if You Get Raised?

Let's start with what to do when you get raised.

When I get raised on the flop I am going to fold the majority of the time, especially when I am OOP.

Being OOP just gives us so many terrible options on later streets so I am going to be more inclined to fold when I am in this spot. But this really isn't even so much about position. It is about them usually having a really strong range when they raise my cbet. If there is one thing that can be said about nearly all micro players it is that they are very passive on average. That really says it all.

This isn't to say that you will never be bluff raised at any point at these limits. What I am saying is that it will occur less frequently at these stakes than at any other limit. So in general you should give their aggression quite a bit of credit.

Every situation is different though and I definitely don't fold 100% of the time that my cbet gets raised. So I am going to go through a bunch of examples to hopefully help you understand how I approach some common spots. Let's start out with some easy ones. And I will be assuming that the raise size is a standard amount (around 3x). I will get to mini-raises in a bit.

Example:

In LP you have,



You raise and get a caller in the SB.

The flop comes,



You cbet and he check/raises.

Regardless of the player type in the above hand I am going to fold here. Our hand has very little actual value. We don't even have any backdoor draws. The only real reliable outs that we figure to have here are with an ace. And there are only three of them left in the deck.

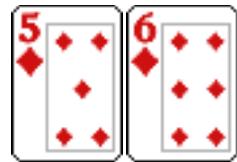
As I said before, most of the time when you get raised by someone at the micros they are representing a pretty strong range. And I think that when you get check/raised it is probably an even stronger one than normal as this play requires a little more forethought and planning.

So I tend to give this raise quite a bit of credit. Perhaps a hand as strong as top pair or better. From time to time they will have a flush or straight draw here but probably not nearly as much as you might think. Remember, these players are passive. Passive players are much more likely to just call with their draws than raise.

So we should just fold here and move on regardless of whether we are IP or OOP. Getting fancy here and trying to outplay them at the micros is a very big mistake.

Example:

In LP you have,



You raise and get a caller in the BB.

The flop comes,



You cbet and he check/raises.

This spot is even easier than the last. We have absolutely no equity here and should just fold 100% of the time versus any player type without giving it much thought. Again, do not ever try to get fancy at the micros in spots like this. Just fold.

Example:

In MP you have,



You raise and get a caller in LP.

The flop comes,



You cbet and he raises.

This spot is a lot closer than the previous two. Firstly, this would be one of those spots where a check/call instead of a cbet would be perfectly fine as well especially if you are up against one of the aggressive player types. We have a decent hand that cannot stand a raise. Checking with the intention of betting the turn and some safe river cards is a line that I would take here against a lot of players.

However let's discuss this hand as played. Once our cbet gets raised here it is completely fine to fold a hand even as strong as this OOP. Especially against the more passive player types who don't usually raise many flops to begin with. There are several reasons for this.

Firstly, yes our hand is TPTK, which is a very strong hand, but we have to consider future streets here and what cards may come and what can happen. With a board this wet and coordinated, literally half of the cards in the deck that come on the turn are going to be scary for us. And the same thing goes for the river.

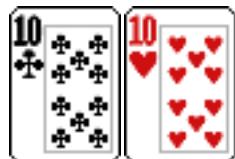
To make matters worse, we are OOP and have no clue what our opponent is going to do. Will he barrel all the remaining streets? Will he give up on the turn but bomb the river when the flush comes in? What do we do then? This leaves us in all sorts of terrible spots with difficult decisions. And at the micros especially I would advocate that you try to keep all of your decisions as simple as possible.

This hand plays a little bit different if we are IP. I will be calling most of the time when they check/raise because position gives us a lot more options. However, I will be very cautious about continuing any further if they can make a big bet on the turn and it is a bad card for us. I will probably be folding even on a safe card versus the majority of opponents if they can make a big bet due to the general passivity at these stakes.

The main point here is to not get yourself wrapped up in the immediate strength of your hand and consider the board and likely scenarios on future streets as well. And always remember this, with a board this wet and coordinated, even if you do get “bluffed” here, it is often by a hand that has a huge draw with something like 40% equity or more. Don’t worry about it. Keep your decisions simple and move on.

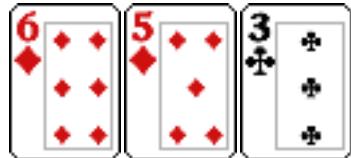
Example:

In EP you have,



You raise and get a caller in MP.

The flop comes,

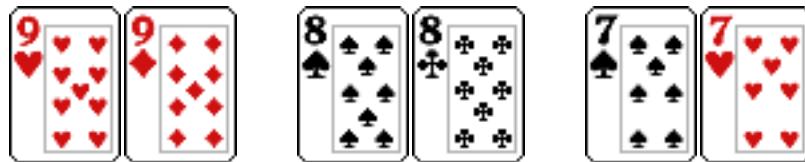


You cbet and he raises.

This spot is close like the last one. We have a pretty strong but vulnerable hand. This is another one of those situations where instead of cbetting I might check/call against one of the more aggressive player types. And I would cbet and fold to a raise versus one of the passive player types.

As played however we should fold here most of the time. This is another situation where position is a big factor. Always remember that calling raises OOP is just like throwing money away. It is much harder to win a pot when OOP and you will find yourself in all sorts of ugly spots with a bloated pot.

This hand is a little bit different than the last one however. We do have two outs to the virtual nuts here with a T. And there don't seem to be as many made hands that can beat us right now. Also there are a couple hands such as,



that our opponent might think that he is raising for value with. For these reasons I would call the raise on the flop if I was IP but I would fold OOP.

Both of these spots are close however. It is not by any means a huge mistake to call the flop in either of them when OOP. You will encounter these situations many times throughout your poker career. It is important not to

get too bogged down on them. When two or more different actions yield a result for us that is pretty close EV-wise, it isn't going to make that much of a difference in the long run which one we decide upon.

The main reason why I would rather fold in these two spots OOP however is because it leads us down the road to bigger mistakes on future streets that really do matter a lot. Remember that it is better to make cut and dried decisions early on in a hand than to get roped into a mess.

What if You Get Mini-Raised?!?

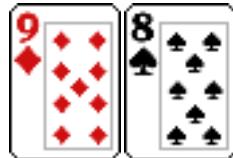
Let's have a look at some mini-raise examples now. I think everybody is probably familiar with this term. A mini-raise is exactly what it sounds like, a minimum raise. It accomplishes the action of a raise while risking the absolute minimum. For this reason a lot of people find them annoying. Probably because they find it easier to fold to a "real" raise. I can't really disagree, they are annoying.

But overall a mini-raise isn't usually a very good play and I don't use it much myself. You can just note which types of players use it the most (overwhelmingly the bad ones) and draw your conclusions from there. The problem with a mini-raise is that it does not price out draws and it does not allow the person doing it to get the maximum value with a big hand. And I think the second point is really the most important one especially at the micros. I will have much more to say about that later though.

But you will get mini-raised routinely at these stakes so let's go through a couple of examples on how to approach them.

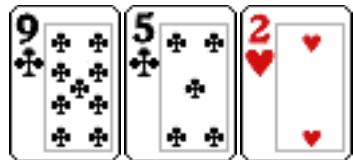
Example:

In LP you have,



You raise and get a caller in the BB.

The flop comes,

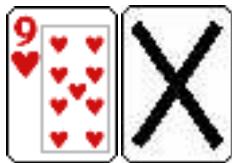


You cbet and he check/minis-raises.

I would call here most of the time IP and sometimes fold OOP. Our hand is kind of a bluff-catcher. This means that we only beat the air and draws in their range and not many made hands. This is a perfect example of the wide range of difference in pair hands. If we had,



here for instance, I would approach this hand very differently. I might re-raise against some opponents. I am certainly at least calling regardless of position. We beat a lot more of the,



type hands and so it pretty much forces them to have a really big hand like an overpair or better. Those are hard to have. But given the minimum raise size I will usually still peel a card with my top pair no kicker and middle pair type hands here as well when IP.

Let's have a look at a bit different situation.

Example:

In EP you have,



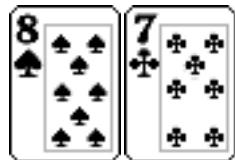
You raise and get a caller in LP.

The flop comes,



You cbet and he mini-raises.

I think this is a fairly common situation at the micros where people spew a lot. The best play here is to fold. Even if our opponent has something as weak as,



he is still around 76% to win the hand. We just aren't really getting the right odds to continue. And there is no guarantee that we will get paid off if we do hit.

As usual, it is a little bit closer if we are IP. This often comes down to player type. Against some really aggressive players or with a particular dynamic in play I might call or even raise. But in general I will still fold most of the time as well. This is another example of making a nice easy decision early on in a hand and moving on.

What if You Get Floated?

Having your cbet floated is a more common occurrence and a lot different of a situation than getting raised. A float just means that your opponent called your cbet. It is also sometimes referred to as a “smooth call” because it is kind of a sly play that doesn’t really give away a lot of information about the strength of the hand.

All a float really tells us is that they have hit the board in some way but probably not in a huge way. But from time to time they will be trapping with a huge hand as well. Determining what a float means really depends on the player type though. As mentioned before, some players will fold to cbets a large amount of the time (nits for instance). And some players (like fish) will continue with a wide range that even includes no pair no draw hands.

Crushing The Microstakes

If you have a good sized sample on someone, at least 100 hands, you can make use of their fold to flop cbet stat. So for instance with this nit player type,

♣ Crushing The Microstakes

Player Name		4400 hands -15.66 BB/100							
Time		5m	10m	20m	session				
Won/lost		\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0				
Pre-flop	Total	EP	MP	CO	BTN	SB	BB		
VP\$IP	9%	9%	8%	9%	10%	8%	6%		
Call Open	6%	3%	(75) 7%	9%	7%	6%	6%		
Limp	5%	7%	6%	4%	2%	7%	0%		
PFR	3%	2%	3%	4%	6%	2%	2%		
Raise 1st	3%	2%	3%	6%	12%	8%	(75) --		
3-Bet	1%	1%	(75) 0%	0%	2%	1%	1%		
Fold to 3B	78% (9)	4-Bet	0% (9)						
Fold to 4B	--	4B range	0.0% (9)						
Steal (total)	CO	Btn	SB	Vs Steal		SB	BB		
8%	6%	12%	8% (75)	Fold		91% (75)	93% (96)		
				Call		7% (75)	5% (96)		
				3Bet		3% (75)	2% (96)		
Post flop	Total	Flop	Turn	River	Showdowns				
Aggression	1.8	2.1	1.4	1.9	WTSD	26%			
Agg Freq	17%	18%	18%	15%	WWSF	32%			
Check-raise	3%	4%	0% (46)	0% (24)	W\$SD	59%			
Vs missed CB					W\$SD(ex small)	63% (48)			
Bet In position	34% (95)	33% (89)	60% (5)	0% (1)					
Bet OOP	19%	-	18%	100%(2)					
Flop As PFR	Total	Regular	3-Bet pot	Turn					
Continuation bet	47% (51)	44% (48)	100%(3)	Continuation bet	63% (8)				
Fold CB to Raise	100%(2)	100%(2)	-	Fold to CB	50% (4)				
Fold to Donk Bet	67% (6)	67% (6)	-						
Raise Donk Bet	0% (6)	0% (6)	-	River					
Vs PFR				Cont bet	0% (1)				
Fold to CB	73% (64)	74% (62)	50% (2)	Fold to CB	0% (1)				
Raise CB	9% (64)	11% (62)	0% (2)						
Donk bet	18% (67)-								
Steal limped pot 20% (45)									

we can see that he is folding 73% of the time to cbets over a huge sample. This is pretty high. As a rough range we can probably put this player on at least top pair or a pretty big draw most of the time if he is still around after our cbet. So if this player floats me on the flop, or raises me for that matter, I will be pretty quick to give him credit.

Whereas with this SLP player type,

♣ Crushing The Microstakes

Player Name	598 hands -26.84 BB/100						
Time	5m	10m	20m	session			
Won/lost	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0			
Pre-flop	Total	EP	MP	CO	BTN	SB	BB
VP\$IP	21%	19%	16%	14% (76)	21% (75)	43% (77)	16% (74)
Call Open	19%	33% (6)	9% (35)	20% (25)	17% (35)	20% (35)	25% (36)
Limp	14%	10%	11% (91)	6% (48)	15% (33)	56% (39)	0% (26)
PFR	6%	9%	5%	4% (76)	7% (75)	5% (77)	4% (74)
Raise 1st	9%	9%	8% (52)	5% (22)	22% (18)	7% (14)	—
3-Bet	2%	17% (6)	0% (35)	4% (25)	0% (35)	3% (35)	3% (36)
Fold to 3B	25% (4)	4-Bet	0% (4)				
Fold to 4B	0% (1)	4B range	0.0% (4)				
Steal (total)					Vs Steal	SB	BB
	CO	Btn	SB	Fold	100% (2)	80% (5)	
11% (54)	5% (22)	22% (18)	7% (14)	Call	0% (2)	0% (5)	
				3Bet	0% (2)	20% (5)	
Post flop	Total	Flop	Turn	River	Showdowns		
Aggression	2.8	2.3	4.2	2.5	WTSD		
Agg Freq	21%	20%	25% (81)	20% (50)	30%		
Check-raise	10% (50)	10% (30)	8% (13)	14% (7)	WWSF		
Vs missed CB					W\$SD		
	Bet In position	35% (26)	32% (25)	100% (1)	55% (38)		
Bet OOP	28% (46)	—	26% (43)	67% (3)	W\$SD(ex small)		
63% (16)							
Flop As PFR	Total	Regular	3-Bet pot				
Continuation bet	45% (11)	44% (9)	50% (2)	Turn			
Fold CB to Raise—	—	—	—	Continuation bet	67% (3)		
Fold to Donk Bet	0% (2)	0% (2)	—	Fold to CB	67% (3)		
Raise Donk Bet	50% (2)	50% (2)	—	River			
Vs PFR					Cont bet	100% (1)	
	Fold to CB	42% (19)	38% (16)	67% (3)	Fold to CB	—	
Raise CB	21% (19)	25% (6)	0% (3)				
Donk bet	4% (26)						
Steal limped pot 31% (13)							

who is only folding to cbets 42% of the time, I will assign a very different range. This guy is continuing over 30% more often than the nit above. This means that he has plenty of bottom and middle pairs, gutshot or just overs type hands. I will not be giving him anywhere near as much credit.

So hopefully this will give you some idea of the kind of range that you should assign players when you get floated. This information will go a long way in determining how you should proceed on the turn.

The Turn

The turn is probably the easiest street to play in hold'em. As mentioned before, most of your decisions should be made on the flop so there won't be a whole lot of guesswork here. You made a plan for the hand and the only thing left to do is follow through with it.

Most of the time when you get to this point you will be looking at a medium sized pot. You raised and got called preflop. You then cbet and got called on the flop. How should you proceed from here?

Giving Up

A lot of the time when you have reached this stage you will have some unpaired, bottom or middle pair type hand and it's time to shut down.

You must always remember that poker is not a game of ego. It is a game of making profitable decisions. Nobody likes to fold but the truth is that when you have shown all this aggression throughout the hand and still can't shake them, you are usually behind.

And the decisions that you make on the turn and river involve much bigger portions of your stack due to the size of the pot. It is imperative that you do not mess around here and throw away money. This is where some of that discipline comes in. The easy thing to do here is get frustrated and try to barrel them off or pull some fancy play. And I know because I have spewed off countless amounts doing it myself!

However, this is just throwing away money most of the time at these stakes. There will be times to continue being aggressive which I will discuss in a bit, but for the most part, you will need to be doing a lot of giving up on this street especially against bad players.

Putting yourself in their shoes is an easy way to think through a lot of spots in poker. Ask yourself here for instance if they would really bet with a mediocre hand, a draw or worse when one of the surest things that we know about microstakes players is that they are very passive. Probably not. And remember the other thing that we know about the micros, they don't like to fold.

So to sum up:

 **If you don't have top pair or better by the turn you shouldn't be putting another penny in the pot the majority of the time at the micros and at NL2 and NL5 in particular.**

Similar to before on the flop there is the small caveat that if they bet something ridiculous like 1/4 the pot or less I will not be folding if I have any kind of equity. So once again I want to make it clear that I am referring to reasonable sized bets here.

Example:

You have,



By the turn the board looks like this,



You cbet the flop and got called.

You checked on the turn and (**any** type of opponent) bets 1/2 pot.

You should fold.

Pot Controlling

Pot controlling is simply the act of slowing down the action by either check/calling or checking behind instead of betting. These spots will happen when you have a top pair or small overpair type hand. These are the only situations on the turn where you should have any kind of real decision to make. And the decision is often very player dependant.

Against SLPs and fish I will certainly be betting again here a lot of the time. This is because we know that they will call with a wide range on the flop. And so they can be in there with all sorts of weak holdings that we are still ahead of on the turn.

This isn't the case with regs however. And in fact against some regs you should just check and fold if they can make a bet. Their AF will play a large determining factor in this decision. But I want to wait until the river section to discuss the specifics of that stat.

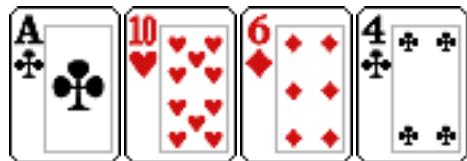
The main reason why you should often pot control in these spots against regs is that they won't call with worse hands anywhere near as much of the time as SLPs and fish will. Also, you force all of their air hands (which they might bluff with) to fold as well. Therefore you only get action from better hands. Let's go through a couple of examples of this.

Example:

You have,



And by the turn the board looks like this,

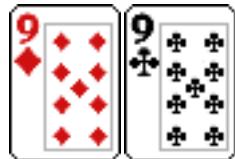


In this spot I will barrel most of the time against SLPs and fish regardless of my position. And since I am betting for value, I will be betting fairly big, around 75% of the pot.

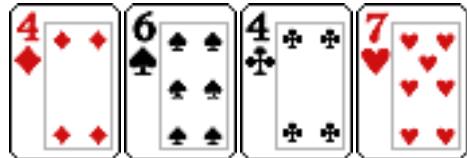
Conversely in this spot I will often pot control against nits and TAG's for the reasons that I just discussed. It's important to note that an added benefit of pot controlling on the turn is that it will create some deception about the strength of your hand. This will often allow you to get that bet out of them on the river anyways.

Example:

You have,



And by the turn the board looks like this,



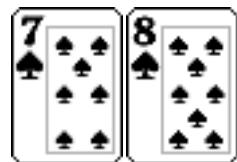
Similar to the hand above, I will usually be betting again here for value against SLPs and fish and pot controlling against regs.

Barrelling

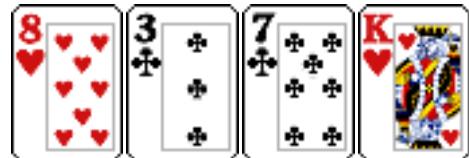
This situation is really straightforward. These are the spots where I have two pair or better. I am looking to bet for value against all opponents. I am looking to play these hands for stacks for the most part. So I will need to bet big, usually at least 75% of the pot.

Example:

You have,



And by the turn the board looks like this,



You cbet the flop and got called.

You should bet big here again against **any** player type.

What if You Get Raised or Lead Into?

So far I have only talked about spots on the turn when your opponent is still playing passively. What should you do if they lead or raise your turn bet? For the most part, and against all player types, I will be folding in these spots without a really strong hand. I think you should make a clear distinction between flop raises and turn or river raises. I think that the latter are a lot stronger in general especially at these stakes.

The reason for this is that these are the big money streets and bluffing here often requires that someone put in a big chunk of their stack. Bluffing for a small portion of your stack is a lot easier. So I tend to give these kinds of plays quite a bit of credit and I think that you should be folding a hand as strong as an overpair a fair bit of the time against them.

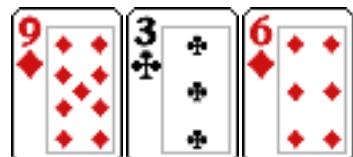
Example:

In MP you have,



You raise and get called by an SLP in LP.

The flop comes,



You cbet and he calls.

The turn comes,



You bet again and he raises.

You should fold.

Example:

In LP you have,



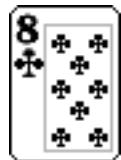
You raise and get called by a nit in the BB.

The flop comes,



You bet the flop and he called.

The turn comes,



He leads.

You should fold.

Bluffing

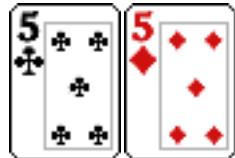
While I said before that we are basically done with the hand without top pair or better on the turn, there is one situation where this isn't always the case.

Against sticky regs I will often fire again on any turn card that is scary for them. Going back to our discussion on perceived ranges recall that we are representing big cards and especially broadways. So against regs who like to float quite a bit I will often fire again on any broadway turn card whether it helps my hand or not. And I will also often fire again if I pick up a good draw.

And you don't have to make it that much. 60-70% of the pot is fine. I should note that my plan is definitely to give up on the river if I get called here. There is no faster way to burn money at the micros than by triple barrel bluffing.

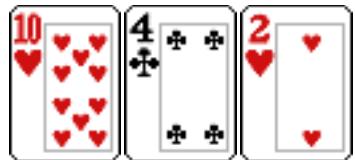
Example:

In EP you have,



You raise and get called by a reg (with a fold to cbet% of less than 60) in LP.

The flop comes,



You cbet and he called.

The turn comes,



You should bet again.

Don't Bluff the Fish

Against SLPs and fish I am usually much less inclined to bet the turn on scare cards. This is because these types of players are much more likely to call with the middle pair regardless. Also, many times they actually have the scare card! Bad players habitually float flops with hands like ace high. You think it is a scare card to them but it actually hit them.

I like to keep my bluffing versus them to an absolute minimum. If I don't have anything against them on the turn I will almost always just give up. If I pick up a draw, I will usually pot control as well. You just don't have the fold equity that you think you do against these types of players and it can be very frustrating to burn money trying to make them fold. Don't bother. There will be plenty of opportunities to blast them with strong hands and they will be more than happy to call you down.

Delayed Cbet

There are two final spots to discuss here which were already touched upon in the flop section. The first one involves the times where we didn't cbet the flop with a mediocre strength hand. As discussed I will do this with my middle pair and even some top pair no kicker type hands, especially when I am OOP and up against an aggressive opponent. I do this because my hand can't stand a raise but I can certainly check/call and allow them to bet with worse.

So if they do bet I will call on the flop and just re-evaluate on the turn. If they can make a big bet again, I will probably let them have it. If it goes check/check on the flop however, I will bet the turn for value. If they raise the turn I will usually fold. One of the benefits of the delayed cbet is that people are less likely to bluff raise it. They seem to give it more credit in my experience. I think if you do get raised and your mediocre hand has not improved, you can safely fold.

Example:

In MP you have,



You raise and get called by a fish in LP.

The flop comes,



You check and he checks.

The turn comes,



You should bet.

Taking a Stab

People often use the term “stab at the pot” which just means to take a shot at it. The second spot to mention involves the times when I had nothing on the flop. I chose not to cbet and they checked as well. Most of the time I will be OOP when I do this but occasionally I will be in IP as well.

You should take a stab at the pot on the turn a decent amount of the time. It depends a lot on the turn card though. If it is one of the cards that hits our perceived range (i.e. a broadway), then I will usually fire 60% of the pot or so. If it is another one of those middling cards that hits their range, I will usually just give up on the hand.

I should mention that position does matter quite a bit though as well. I will **always** be taking a shot at the pot when I am IP. This is working off the (usually correct) assumption that people just don’t check twice with anything good. So you can usually take down the pot pretty easily regardless of what you have.

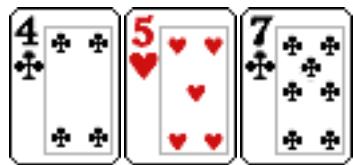
Example:

In the SB you have,



You raise and get called by an SLP in the BB.

The flop comes,



You check and he checks.

The turn comes,



You should bet.

The River

The river is everybody's favorite street. This is where the big action goes down and fortunes are won or lost. Millions of dollars and poker immortality hang in the balance. Icy stares meet sweaty palms and there is a decision for every last chip. Perhaps I am being a bit melodramatic here.

Unfortunately our microstakes cash games will rarely offer such white knuckle excitement. But on average this is where the biggest bets will be made. And occasionally we will be faced with some big decisions for our stack. So we need to make sure that we are doing things right here.

However, since we created a plan for the hand on the flop, the river, just like the turn, shouldn't provide too many difficult decisions for us. But it isn't quite as cut and dried as the turn so I will have a fair bit more to say. Since there are no more cards to come after the river is dealt, we can break our decisions down based on the strength of our hand and our opponent's final range.

No Pair Hands

Just like on the turn, whether IP or OOP, with no pair hands on the river most of the time the best play for us is simply going to be to give up. However there are some spots where there is value to be had in check/calling. And these situations arise almost solely against fish.

Fish will often bluff the river with their missed draws. The great thing about their "bluff" though is that it is usually for a very small amount such as 1/4 the size of the pot. With such a small bet, we only need to be right a small amount of the time for a call to be profitable.

Now obviously when I talk about calling here with a no pair hand I am talking about the top of our no pair range which is ace high. There is no more embarrassing situation in poker than getting value-towned by a worse no pair hand. So I am talking about ace high hands only and usually only the strongest ones at that, AJ or better.

While fish make it easy on us with their small bet, the board texture can also help us out a lot in these spots. The first thing to look for is the obvious draws. Did they miss or did they come in on the river?

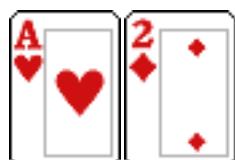
For instance, consider a board that reads like this on the river:



And you have:



We will assume that we made a standard cbet on the flop against a fish and got called. The turn went check/check and then the fish leads on the river for 1/4 pot. This would be a fairly easy call with AK high. There are so many missed draws on this board. Hands like,



are just a few of the kinds of hands that fish will have called with on the flop which our AK is still ahead of. I just want to be clear however that if they can make anything like a reasonable sized bet, you should fold most of the time. And by reasonable I mean about 1/2 of the pot or more.

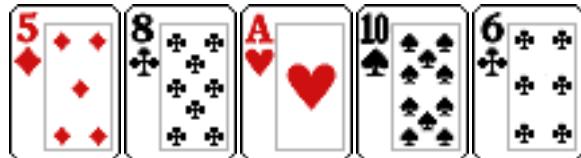
Pair Hands

River decisions with one pair hands will happen fairly regularly and we can break them down into value bets and value calls.

Value Betting With a Top Pair Hand

When betting for value with a top pair hand it will often be after we have checked the turn for pot control. We did this for a number of reasons. Against the more solid player types, regs especially, we didn't expect to be able to bet the turn and get called by worse very often. This also disguises the strength of our hand and gives us a much better chance of getting some value now. There will certainly be plenty of occasions however where we have TPTK or TPGK against a fish and should go for three streets of value. I will discuss those spots later.

So a common situation might be one like this with the board reading,



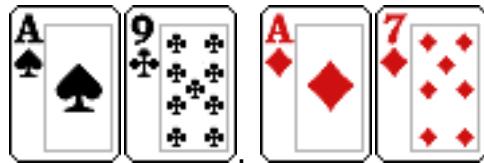
And you have,



So assume you cbet and then checked the turn for pot control against a reg. On the river this is now a clear value bet situation. If you are OOP, then you should bet. And if you are IP it is an even easier bet as people

Crushing The Microstakes

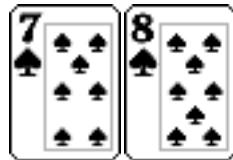
don't check twice with something good. There are plenty of hands that you can get value from such as worse aces,



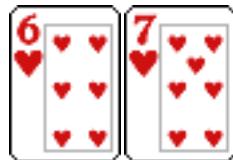
pairs,



and possibly even some hands as weak as,



or

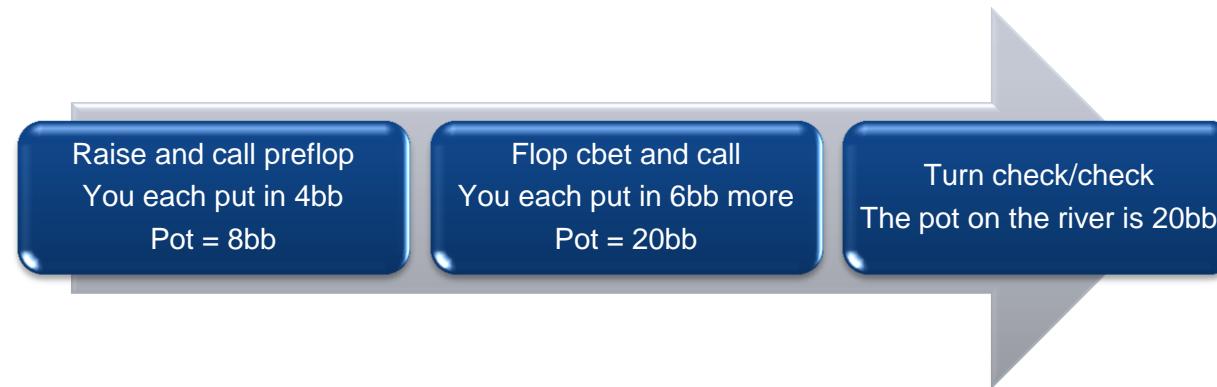


You should bet around 2/3 of the pot.

Crushing The Microstakes

You do not want to bet too small and not get enough value from your hand. However you also don't want to bet too big and blow all these worse hands out of the water. So I think a bet of about 2/3 the pot accomplishes that.

The size of the pot in these situations will usually be around 20 big blinds.



If you bet 20 big blinds and only get a call 1/10 times when you could have gotten a call 5/10 times with a 13 big blind bet it should be pretty obvious how big of a mistake this is.


$$20\text{bb} \times 1 = 20\text{bb}$$



If we were to run this scenario 10 times we would have cost ourselves 45bb or nearly 1/2 a stack! Now to be fair, these call percentages are certainly a little bit arbitrary as it's hard to be certain but I think the main point here should be clear.

River value bet situations seem like fairly mundane spots but they add up in a big way over the longrun. A big part of your winrate is really just about how well you play in a lot of fairly ordinary situations like this one. It is important to make sure that you squeeze every last big blind out of them with the right bet size.

Against fish and most SLPs however, the rules go out the window as usual. With them a bigger bet is usually the best way to go. As we have seen several times now, their decisions are mostly based on what they think about their own hand, not what their opponent could have or what a certain bet sizing could mean.

For the most part, they are going to call if they are going to call and they are going to fold if they are going to fold. So when you have a hand like this that stands to be ahead of their range a large amount of the time, you should bet big. Also, they are more likely to interpret a big bet as a bluff. More on that later though.

Value Betting With Bottom and Middle Pair Hands

So far I have only discussed what to do with top pair hands on the river. What if you have a more mediocre holding such as bottom or middle pair? These situations are a little bit more tricky and are very player dependent. Against most competent players I don't think you should be value betting too often in these kinds of spots. This is because you simply won't get called by worse often enough.

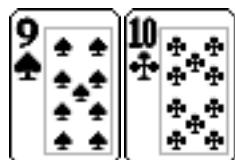
Their range is usually very polarized by the river. They either have a missed draw for nothing or a middle pair type hand or better. So if you bet your middling strength hand, they fold their missed draw and you take down a pot that you would have won at showdown anyways. And conversely you only get called (and sometimes raised) by better hands. A lose/lose situation.

However, against fish and most SLPs you will get called by worse hands often enough to warrant a bet. You should still be aware of your hand strength however. There is a big difference between middle pair no kicker and middle pair top kicker for instance. But I would still advocate that you value bet the bottom end of this range as well. These players love to make hero calls with many worse hands. Against a reg on the other hand, I will usually only bet with middle pair good kicker or better.

The two examples below will hopefully help illustrate this. In the first one I would value bet against SLPs and fish only. In the second one I would value bet against all player types.

Example:

I have,

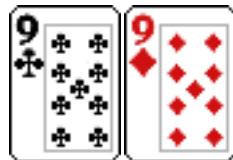


And the board is,



Example:

I have,



And the board is,



It is important to note here that I will often bet 1/2 pot in these spots even against SLP and fish. On really dry boards like this it is really hard for them to have anything. I think that with a smaller bet sizing they will be more inclined to make a hero call with ace high or bottom pair.

With my third, fourth and bottom pair type hands I will usually just look to check it down on the river against all player types. I just don't think there is enough value in betting these types of hands. I don't get called by worse often enough. And I don't need to turn my hand into a bluff because I often have the best hand anyways.

Value Calling With a One Pair Hand

Sometimes of course the action on the river will be taken away from you. However, since bluffing ranges are at their widest on this street (fish love to bluff their missed draw on the river as we already saw), things don't

actually change a whole lot with calling versus betting. You just happen to be value calling now instead of value betting.

As I mentioned before, ranges are generally pretty polarized in no limit hold'em so oftentimes a one pair hand, especially top pair, can be a great bluff catcher. But whether you should bluff catch or not is very player dependent. In a vacuum against a nit for instance I would say that 9/10 times calling will be a bad idea because they are generally very tight and somewhat passive players.

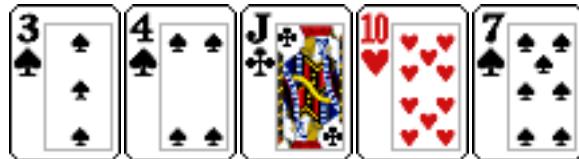
However, board texture and the flow of the action are very important pieces of the puzzle as well.

Example:

You have,



Calling a river bet on this board,



is very different from calling a river bet on this one,



The river in the first example is about the worst card in the deck for us. It completes both the flush and straight draws. Conversely, it is the best card in the deck for their perceived range which includes a lot of draws. The river in the second example however is about one of the safest looking cards for us. It essentially changes nothing.

The first thing that you should look at in these spots however is your opponent's AF.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes

Player Name	1263 hands						
Won \$3.27	12.98 BB/100						
Time	5m	10m	20m	session			
Won/lost	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0			
Pre-flop	Total	EP	MP	CO	BTN	SB	BB
VP\$IP	14%	8%	16%	22%	20%	14%	11%
Call Open	6%	4%	(27) 5%	(64) 9%	(47) 3%	(62) 4%	(75) 11% (91)
Limp	6%	4%	5%	14%	9%	(97) 8%	(79) 0% (60)
PFR	8%	4%	11%	10%	13%	9%	4%
Raise 1st	13%	4%	19%	26%	(42) 34%	(35) 23%	(22) -
3-Bet	1%	0%	(27) 0%	(64) 0%	(47) 2%	(62) 5%	(75) 0% (91)
Fold to 3B	63% (8)	4-Bet	25% (8)				
Fold to 4B	--	4B range	2.0% (8)				
Steal (total)	CO	Btn	SB	Vs Steal		SB	BB
28% (99)	26% (42)	34% (35)	23% (22)	Fold		89% (18)	86% (21)
				Call		6% (18)	14% (21)
				3Bet		6% (18)	0% (21)
Post flop	Total	Flop	Turn	River	Showdowns		
Aggression	1.8	1.8	2.2	1.2	WTSD		29%
Agg Freq	20%	22%	24%	10% (70)	WWSF		37%
Check-raise	7% (58)	8% (36)	7% (15)	0% (7)	WSSD		67% (51)
Vs missed CB					WSSD(ex small)		77% (26)
Bet In position	40% (53)	38% (52)	100% (1)	-			
Bet OOP	17% (42)	--	17% (42)	-			
Flop As PFR	Total	Regular	3-Bet pot	Turn	River		
Continuation bet	57% (42)	55% (40)	100% (2)	Continuation bet	33% (6)		
Fold CB to Raise	33% (3)	33% (3)	--	Fold to CB	67% (3)		
Fold to Donk Bet	11% (9)	11% (9)	--				
Raise Donk Bet	11% (9)	11% (9)	--				
Vs PFR							
Fold to CB	60% (20)	58% (19)	100% (1)	Cont bet	50% (2)		
Raise CB	20% (20)	21% (19)	0% (1)	Fold to CB	--		
Donk bet	0% (17)	--					
Steal limped pot 25% (20)							

AF stands for aggression factor and is the resulting number when betting and raising frequencies are divided by calling frequencies. I just focus on what the AF number means as it applies to their range though. Like with all other HUD stats you need to make sure that you have a reasonable sample size first however. I like to have at least 100 hands on somebody before paying much attention to this stat and more is always better of course.

From my experience this stat is a dead giveaway with many players at the micros as to whether they are even capable of bluffing the river or any other street for that matter. And I should mention that I am referring to the overall AF as indicated above. You can use the individual AF by street as well but keep in mind that you will need a much bigger sample size.



AF of 1

Players with an AF of 1 or less are pretty much incapable of bluffing in my experience. I would be very hesitant to call a river bet against them in the situation above even on the safe river card. I think their value betting range is an overpair at minimum and often two pair or better.



AF of 2

Players with an AF closer to 2 are a bit different. They are still mostly betting for value but they will also bet with some worse pairs or random bluffs from time to time. I would call against them on the safe river and fold on the bad one.



AF of 3 or 4

Good players (TAGs) generally have an AF of 3 or 4. These players balance their range well and will show up with bluffs and good hands with a pretty equal frequency. This makes them difficult to play against. I would definitely call against them on the safe river. It's pretty close on the bad river though.



AF of 5 or more

Against maniac types with an AF of 5 or more, you can of course call pretty wide here. I would look them up on both rivers and possibly with some middle pair type hands as well.

I just want to mention that when I talk about calling on the river here I am talking about a reasonable sized bet of between 50-75% of the pot. I have already talked about the smaller bets. You should call a bit lighter in those cases for sure given the price that you are getting on the pot.

If they bet pot or overbet however, it changes things quite a bit. I think overbets are often a very strong hand and I would stay away from calling them without some sort of specific dynamic in play. Pot sized bets can definitely be bluffs from time to time but I think they are for value more often than not. Remember we are not here to be a hero or massage our ego. If they are screwing around it will just be a matter of time anyways.

The Heart of it All (Extraction)

Now that I have gone over the preflop and postflop strategies in depth I can finally discuss my favorite topic which is something I call “extraction.”

Extraction, which refers to getting the absolute maximum value out of your good to great hands, is the heart of winning huge at the micros.

In fact, largely as a joke I had toyed with the idea of naming this book “Flop a Set: Hit the Pot Button.”

Because that is my secret. Seriously, that's it. Make bad players pay!

If I could pick one thing that I believe is the biggest reason why I consistently maintain much higher winrates at these limits than others, it is this.

I **never** (and I really mean never) win a small pot with my big hands (sets and big overpairs especially). It is true that sometimes I lose a massive pot but this doesn't come close to making up for all the times that I win a massive one. I get the maximum. And that is a huge part of my success.

There is no slowplay in my game (unless I have quads or better). Fastplay is the new slowplay as far as I am concerned. One of the biggest losing mentalities that I think people need to get over is this idea that they need to keep them in the pot or that they don't want to scare them off.

This is the best reply that I can give to this: I have won nearly **30k** at these limits \$2, \$5 and \$10 at a time. I didn't do it by slowplaying and hoping they bet. I did it by ruthlessly shoving my two pair or better hands down their throat! I bet pot, sometimes even double pot, or I just go all in.

And they call. That's it.

You absolutely have to lose the idea that bad players need to be cajoled or massaged into coming along for the ride. Stop trying to think on level 10 when they are at level 1! Bad players like to call. Period.

They will find any reason to call. And if you have been winning some pots recently at the table they might make a stand with ace high for their stack. Seriously, they will.

Give them a chance to do that.

Don't let them check their ace high behind 3 times. Yes they are going to fold every once in awhile when they have nothing. So what! You weren't going to get anything out of them anyways. That's just how this game works. You generally need people to have something in order to win a big pot.

I just can't stress how important shedding yourself of this passive mentality is at the micros. It is by far the biggest problem that I see with players at these limits. When you make a big hand against a bad player (heck, against many regs also), become a maniac. Go nuts. Count your money later. Thank me later.

Let's go through a few examples of this with different hand strengths.

TPTK

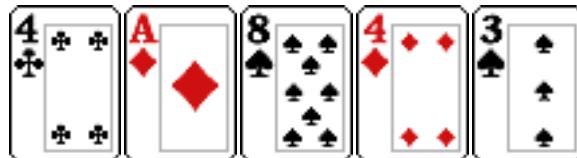
As we have seen, plenty of the time you should be pot controlling your top pair type hands especially against reasonable opponents. Well there are also plenty of instances where you should throw pot control out the window and go for three streets of value as well. These will usually be spots where you have TPGK or TPTK and are up against one of the weaker player types.

Example:

You have,



And the boards runs out,

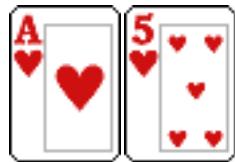


It is very important that you bet big on all three streets here against all fish, SLPs and even a lot of regs. Especially when the board pairs a low card like this, there are just so few hands that can beat you. Most players at the micros will be incapable of folding a decent ace here. And the bad player types will not be capable of folding any ace and sometimes even worse. Do not pot control or get tricky in these situations.

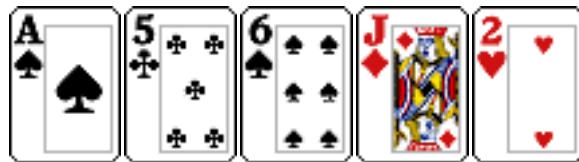
Two Pair

As we saw earlier there are several different kinds of two pair hands all the way from top two to bottom two. Top two of course beats a bunch more hands than bottom two and so we should play it a bit differently. But on a dry board where no obvious draws come through, I will still try to get three streets of value out of these hands most of the time.

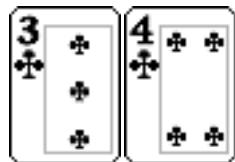
Example: You have,



And the board runs out,



Against all player types at the micros I will be going for three streets of value here with big bets. None of this half pot stuff. I am looking to get stacks in. Fish and SLPs will call the whole way here with any ace. And there are plenty of draws that will call big bets as well. Even though the,



draw got there on the river, I will still be firing for value against all player types. If the river was say the,



which completes two draws, I would probably slow down and check/call, check behind or even check/fold against some players depending on the sizing and their AF. But in general I think you get the idea here. You

need to be betting these types of hands ruthlessly and you need to be betting big, especially against the fish and SLPs. I really would just use the pot button against them. Against regs, I might bet 75 or 80% just so perhaps it doesn't look quite so obvious to them. Pot is fine against some of them as well though.

Sets

So we already talked about how to mine for your set. Now let's get to the fun part. What do you do when you hit it? This depends on two things.

- Your position
- Whether you were the preflop raiser or the preflop caller



IP as the Preflop Caller

You should be raising the preflop raiser's cbet big or betting close to pot yourself if they don't cbet.



IP as the Preflop Raiser

You should be cbetting big when they check to you or making a big raise if they lead.



OOP as the Preflop Caller

You should be check/raising big.



OOP as the Preflop Raiser

You should be cbetting big.

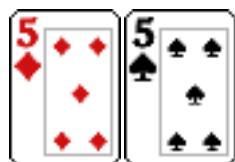
The above are the best lines to take with your set at the micros in my experience. They are very straightforward. There is nothing tricky about them. And they get the most money in the middle with the highest efficiency. I would suggest that you use these lines nearly every single time at the micros.

And when I say “raise big” I mean that you should make it 3x or 4x their bet size and sometimes more if they are really bad and the stacks are deep. This is assuming that they bet a reasonable amount however. If they make some probing min type of bet, then you will need to raise it a lot more.

If you are lucky enough to get a raise or re-raise out of them on the flop, you should re-raise them back 3x or just shove depending on stack sizes. Try to get all the money in the middle immediately. If you play your sets in the above manner you will maximize your winrate with them at NL2 and NL5. At higher limits it will be necessary to mix things up a little bit sometimes so that you don’t appear quite so transparent. Don’t worry about it at NL2 and NL5.

Example:

In LP you have,



A nit raises in EP and you call.

The flop comes,

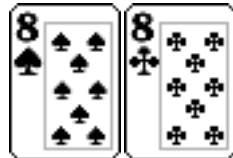


He makes a cbet.

You should make a big raise.

Example:

In the SB you have,



An SLP raises from MP and you call.

The flop comes,



He makes a cbet.

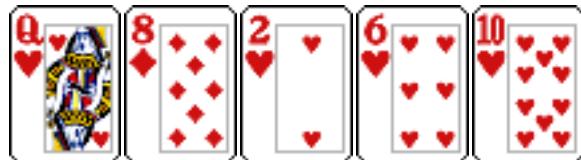
You should make a big check/raise.

If these hands continue past the flop to the turn or river your strategy should be similar. Bet large and get the money in. Do not attempt a check/raise again on the turn. Just lead the turn. And lead it big. Find a way to get the money in. Hitting the pot button is usually the best way to go about that.

There will be a couple of fairly rare situations where you will have to alter your strategy on later streets. If the board runs out something ridiculous such as,



or



you will of course have to slow down and possibly even fold to a big bet on the river. However, barring something crazy like this happening **your general strategy with sets should be bet, bet, shove**. And this applies to both NL2, NL5 and higher.

Overpairs

My strategy with overpairs (especially the big ones, AA and KK) is pretty similar to sets. Again, barring a highly coordinated board or some ridiculous turn and river cards my strategy will be bet, bet, shove.

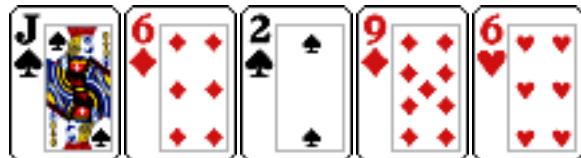
Example:

In EP you have,



You raise and get called by a fish in LP.

The boards run out,



You should bet, bet, shove.

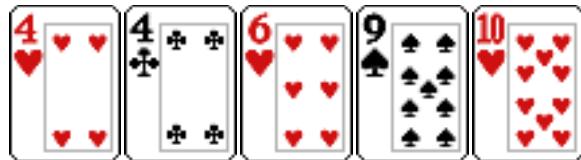
Example:

In MP you have,



You raise and get called by an SLP in the SB,

The board runs out,



You should bet, bet, shove.

Facing Aggression With an Overpair

As I mentioned, when facing aggression with a set, I think you should try and get the money in pretty much every time. When facing aggression with an overpair it is not so simple. Sometimes you are going to need to get away. But not that often.

This is a difficult spot for many players, especially with the big pairs, which is why set mining is so profitable. It is hard to provide very many hard and fast rules for this though as it depends on a number of different factors.

However, against nits and even most TAGs you can make the easiest laydowns in spots like these. With nits especially we know that they are on a very tight range and aren't overly aggressive. They are basically sitting around waiting for nut hands. When they wake up (fight back against your bet, bet, shove) they will have it the overwhelming majority of the time. You can safely fold against them.

With SLPs and fish things are a bit different. They are passive as well but they also have a really wide range, will overvalue plenty of hands that they shouldn't, and are much more prone to just flip out for no apparent reason. I get away versus them sometimes but not nearly as often as against regs. And often their raise or donk bets will be so small that you can just call down relatively cheaply anyways.

As I talked about before, it is important to remember that there is a big difference between a flop raise and a turn raise though. When you get raised on the flop, plenty of players at the micros can do this from time to time with a range that includes draws and other stuff that you beat.

When they raise you on the turn however, it is a much stronger play. Due to the increased size of the pot a raise often requires that they put in a considerable portion of their stack. This is a lot scarier and so most players will just call instead.

Furthermore, you always have to put yourself in your opponent's shoes. Ask yourself, would they really turn a mediocre hand into a big bluff here? The answer is going to be no the large majority of the time at the micros. Micro players call down with mediocre hands, they don't raise with them.

These spots are difficult for many people though and for good reason. They are close. And as we know when a situation is close, it isn't going to make that much of a difference to your long term winrate whichever way you decide. Also, at some future point in time, your opponents are going to be put in these same spots and have just as difficult a time folding versus you. So don't worry about them too much. Just make sure you are making the obvious folds against the regs.

Example:

In EP you have,



You raise and get called by a fish in the BB.

The flop comes,

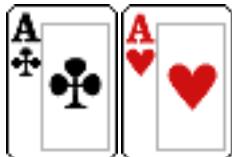


You cbet and he check/raises.

You should re-raise and get it in or call and get it in on most turns.

Example:

In MP you have,



You raise and get called by a nit in the SB.

The flop comes,



You cbet and he check/raises.

You should call.

If he leads for a decent sized bet on a non-ace turn, you should fold.

Here is a recent video of mine where I discuss these spots in some more detail.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6GTh2uAKaM>

Monsters

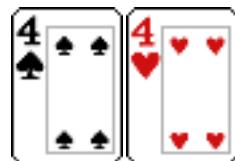
I don't want to talk too much about monsters (quads or better) because they are pretty rare and you don't really need my help to tell you what to do with them. However there are a couple of things to keep in mind.

I am just going to fast forward to the river because for the most part you should always be slowplaying these hands. You have the deck crushed so hard that it just doesn't really make sense to bet or raise on earlier streets.

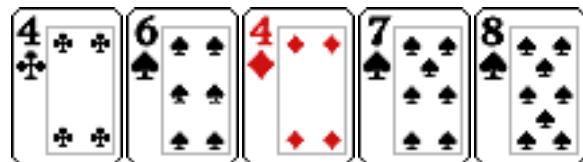
River shoves into tiny pots with your monsters can definitely help your winrate when done correctly. You need to always remember that at the micros people don't like to fold. And they especially don't like to fold two pair or better. And this is especially the case with fish. So sometimes it is better to just shove on an action river card than to bet a normal amount because they will call either amount.

Example:

You have,



and the board is,



A fish or SLP has been firing little probing bets throughout the hand.

You should go all in.

It is much better to just go all in on this river even though there is hardly anything in the pot at all. Bad players at the micros won't fold a 5 here and they definitely won't fold a flush. But they often won't re-raise with either of those hands either. So you should overbet shove and give them the opportunity to make a huge mistake. You will be surprised at how often an enormous pot gets shipped your way.

Some General Rules

If you are like me, you hate the answer “it depends.” I think most people do. But unfortunately that is the best answer much of the time in poker. There are so many different factors and scenarios and dynamics that go into a hand that often it is difficult for an outsider to even comment without asking a bunch of questions first.

But don’t despair, there actually are some general rules for the micros that are quite reliable. And this is mostly because the players at these stakes don’t balance their ranges very well. They generally play on extremes. For instance: way too tight, way too loose, way too passive or way too aggressive. This makes them highly predictable and easy to play against.

I will also discuss a number of topics that I couldn’t find a spot for above. I wanted to keep the preflop and postflop sections as linear and to the point as possible. But poker is a very complex game, even at the smallest stakes, and there is much more to talk about.

Keep Your Decisions Simple

The first thing that I would like to talk about is something has been mentioned many times throughout this book, keeping your decisions simple. This is especially the case if you are mass-tabling. Poker does not need to be an overly difficult game. People ask me all the time how I play 24 tables at once and keep up with everything. Honestly more than anything it’s just because the vast majority of my decisions are simple and automatic.

Once you do something enough times you develop an ability to almost perform it in your sleep. Renowned poker mental game coach Jared Tendler refers to this as “unconscious competence.” Much like riding a bike or driving a car, you don’t really need to think about it. You just do it. And you should strive to make most of your poker decisions like this as well.

It's much easier to remember something simple than something that is overly complicated. That is why I have tried to lay out an almost "if, then" approach to poker in this book. You want to keep yourself out of situations where you might get "lost" as much as possible.

Don't try to ad lib things on the fly especially when you are playing a lot of tables at once. Cbet the boards where you should cbet, give up when they fight back most of the time etc. One of the biggest problems that I see with my students, and players at the micros in general, is that they will do something completely outside the box for no apparent reason.

Something like slowplaying in an obvious value bet spot when there is no reason to believe that they can expect a bet out of their opponent. Or playing a mediocre hand in a far too aggressive manner based on some flimsy reasoning with limited information.

When you throw the plan out the window and just do things on the fly you aren't really thinking enough about why you are making certain decisions. The whole point of the plan was to remove this element of randomness and take profitable well thought out lines.

Doing silly stuff for no real reason is often referred to as FPS (fancy play syndrome). Don't do it! FPS may work well for high stakes heads up games. But it doesn't apply at all to multi-tableing microstakes cash games.

Don't Bluff at the Micros

I am sure you have heard this one before. Well it is true. Don't bluff at the micros. But what is a bluff? Here's my definition.

A *bluff* is a bet made on the turn or river when you have nothing at all.

This definition leaves out cbets. As we already saw, you should be routinely cbetting when you have nothing at all. It also excludes semi bluffing (you have something reasonable, an 8 out draw for instance). I will have more to say about semi-bluffing in a bit but suffice it to say, it has a place in certain spots at the micros as well.

What I am talking about here is betting with virtually nothing on the turn or river. This is sometimes referred to as a “stone cold bluff.” I would strongly advocate that you stay away from doing this especially at NL2 and NL5. As we know, it’s just not necessary to build an image or balance anything at these stakes because by and large they aren’t paying any attention to you. Just bet for value for the most part. Bluffing is often just lighting money on fire at these stakes.

Dynamic

In almost every situation that I have discussed so far in this book I have talked about what to do in a vacuum. That is, my suggestions were simply general guidelines for some common spots that should give you a blueprint from which to work from.

However poker is of course a game played between people. And with money on the line, and the swings involved, people tend to get quite emotional at times. This can lead to erratic decision making.

While the above guidelines should work out well for you in the vast majority of spots, I want to talk a little bit about this idea of the “dynamic” between you and your opponent. When taken into account, from time to time you will need to throw the guidelines out the window.

A dynamic is the recent history between you and your opponent. You don’t need a psychology degree to know that if you have been pounding on someone they aren’t going to put up with it forever. And with weaker players, especially fish, their fuse is often ultra short.

If you have just won a big pot or two off of a fish without showing your hand, you should realize that your implied odds (what you stand to win) are through the roof in the next couple of hands. They will not give you any credit for anything.

They do not have the patience or foresight to consider that you may just happen to be picking up some good hands against them. So you will want to exploit this. You should value bet them a bit lighter, be ready to bluff catch a little more and be less inclined to even waste a cbet if you miss.

It is a good idea to keep these kinds of things in mind while playing. I do realize that this can be hard to do while playing a lot of tables at once though. But instead of following the suggestions that I set out above every time, you should try to improvise from time to time if there is a meaningful dynamic between you and your opponent. And of course, only you will know this.

Fish Psychology

This is something that I have alluded to throughout this book as well, especially in the NL2 specific sections. I will have quite a bit to say about this subject. I think that my understanding of “fish psychology” is a big part of the “secret” to my success at these stakes. And this stuff is very rarely talked about in poker books, on forums or anywhere else. Probably because I just made up the term. Enough buildup though! What are you talking about?

I am talking about putting yourself into the mind of a bad player and trying to see the poker table how they see it.

I know it’s hard. There isn’t a lot of rhyme or reason behind what they do a lot of the time. But there are a few patterns amidst all the madness. Here are 3 general rules which are applicable to almost all fish.



They like to “see where they are at” in hands with min bets, donk bets and probing bets.

These small bets are a dead giveaway that they don’t have anything very good. They usually represent top pair no kicker at best but more often they are a draw, bottom or middle pair or complete air. You can raise them up pretty liberally with a wide range, especially when IP.



If the size of their bet doesn’t change from street to street, then neither has the strength of their hand.

If a fish bets 2 big blinds on the flop, 2 on the turn and 2 on the river, his hand strength (whatever that is) has very likely not improved. Also this is very rarely anything better than a top pair hand. You can use this information to your advantage.



Fish don’t bluff big.

Well they do sometimes, but not very often. As mentioned in the river section, they will definitely bluff their missed draws, but often only for a small amount such as 1/4 of the pot. When they fire a pot sized bet it is often with a strong hand.

But now I really want to get to the heart of fish psychology. This really is the core of my “secret.”

Fish are sceptical and always think you are bluffing.

Think of the 10 dollar home games that you have played in. It's no fold'em right? Fish play microstakes online poker with the same approach. Their #1 concern is their pride. They absolutely hate to get bluffed. And they will call you down to make you honest dammit!

This brings me to my second point. While fish are already suspicious of us in general, they are even more prone to think that we are bluffing if we make a big bet.

Fish view big bets as a bluff.

Fish view a big bet as a scared hand trying to "buy the pot" or "bully" them. If you ever want to get a fish's attention in a hand just make a huge bet. They will perk up and give you the long stare down and try to "read your soul." They will tank and give you a lecture even if they have nothing at all. This is what fish love to do. After all, they have seen their poker heroes on TV do it for many years. Fish play this game for the big call. It's what gets them excited.

So how do we use all of this to our advantage? I think you can already see where I am going with this. We should show up with the exact opposite range of hands that they expect us to have when we make a big bet. They expect a bluff so we should show up with the nuts every time.

And I should mention that I believe this principle applies when you are playing fish at any limit, not just NL2 or NL5. However, it may work a bit better at lower stakes where the amount of money involved doesn't mean much to them.

I use this idea of fish psychology to win absolutely enormous pots off of them. In the deepstacked NL2 and NL5 games when I pick up a big hand I will win a 500bb pot off of the fish. If some other mediocre reg were to play my exact same hand against the exact same fish they would employ some silly half potting strategy and only win a 200bb pot. Do you see why my winrate is so much higher than his?

The whole point of this section really is that fish love to call. But everybody already knows that. What everybody doesn't seem to know is that even though it sounds completely backwards fish are actually more likely to call a

ridiculous sized bet than a regular one. If you want a big winrate then you need to take the fish for every last penny when you pick up a big hand. Anything that is left in his stack after the showdown is money that you threw away.

Massive Flop Bets/Raises

I have talked about using crazy raises sizes against bad players with your nut hands preflop at NL2. And I mentioned how this applies to 3bet sizing as well. Make everything bigger against players who will call anything.

What about postflop? The same principle applies here. One of my best “tricks,” especially for NL2, is the massive flop bet or raise. And I will use this against a lot of bad regs as well. Always keep in mind that regs at the lowest limits are just above the mentality of fish themselves. Fish psychology will often work against them as well.

So on the flop with nut hands (two pair or better) most people will raise 2.5x or 3x. I prefer to make it maybe double that, perhaps 6x. The truth is, I don’t really count it out. I just move the slider bar to some amount that looks ludicrous. I might even raise it more against a fish who I have a dynamic with. The point is, I do something that is completely crazy to them. They flip out in spots like this against me with an amazing amount of regularity.

Yes it is true that plenty of the time they will just fold and you will feel bad about blowing them off of your monster hand. However, the amount of times that they will go nuts and stick in their stack drawing close to dead will certainly make up for this and more.

Remember that these players are often very mentally weak. They don’t handle tilt well, they are very superstitious etc. They are a powder keg waiting to explode. Doing something crazy that “embarrasses them” can often ignite that switch. And at the very least it will often start the wheels in motion to pissing them off and

getting them to make a big mistake against you later on. This is mental warfare. Use all weapons available to you.

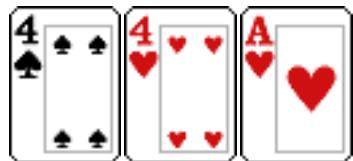
I have experimented with all sorts of ways of applying this fish psychology principle in the past and not only is it highly profitable, but it is very funny as well. You should laugh a lot when you play poker. It's a crazy, ridiculous game that will make you yearn for the insane asylum at times. So you may as well laugh about it.

Example:

You have,



And the board reads,



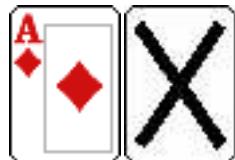
Basically you have the nuts. Now if you made a standard preflop raise here to say 4x and got a single caller, then the pot will be around 8 or 9bb on the flop. And a standard cbet here would be 6bb or so.

However, if your opponent is a bad player and the stacks are deep why not try something ridiculous here? And if there is a dynamic between you and him (especially with you winning a bunch of recent pots) I would do

something ridiculous here as my standard play. So instead of the normal 6bb cbet I would probably make it 12bb or 15bb.

This just goes back to the principle of fish psychology. Against a normal cbet they will probably just play their hand fairly standard and make a bunch of bad call downs if they happen to share the ace. It will be difficult to win a really big pot this way however. If he happens to have a 4 in his hand, we are going to lose a big pot either way so that isn't worth discussing.

But if you make an overbet cbet you will immediately command their attention and often get them to flip out with a wide variety of hands. This also allows you to always stack their



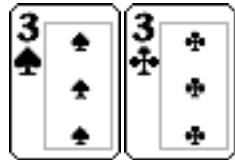
type hands which should be a huge source of your profit at these stakes.

The above hand is a bit of an anomaly however. I want to be clear that most of the time when I do these ridiculous bets or raises on the flop it is with a two pair or better hand. If there is a dynamic between you and a bad player however you should certainly lower your standards to TPGK or TPTK though.

Stacks are 250bb.

Example:

In the BB you have,



A fish raises in EP and you call.

The flop comes,



He cbets 1/2 pot.

You should re-raise perhaps 6x what he bet.

He is calling with any draw or king and your overbet may make him put on his sheriff's hat with a jack as well!

Turn Raises are Usually the Nuts

I talked about this before but I just want to reiterate this point. When you get raised on the turn at the micros (assuming you bet the flop), it is almost always a nut hand. By nut hand I just mean two pair or better. So if you can't beat two pair or better you should strongly consider folding. Micro players are passive. Very few of them are capable of turning a draw or a mediocre hand into a bluff on the turn. That is an advanced play that you will not see until higher stakes.

There are a few situations where you will need to use some discretion. These will be spots where a specific dynamic is in play against a bad player. You have been winning a lot of pots against him, making big bets and he is obviously quite sick of you. You have to be aware that they will flip out and do irrational things eventually and you will need to make some calls. Maniacs will be an obvious exception to this turn raise rule as well. However for the most part, with no real history, against a standard passive opponent at the micros, you need to give these raises a lot of credit.

River Raises are Always the Nuts

Yes always. I said it. I think it was Patrick Antonius who said that early on in his poker career he discovered this and made a point to stop calling them. And who am I to argue with the great PA? He is absolutely right of course though. And especially at the micros, where again, players are passive, you just won't see many bluffs in this spot. River raises are simply always the nuts.

I see a lot of people throwing away money to make that "crying call" even when they absolutely know that they are beat. **There is no such thing as a crying call in poker. There is such a thing as a bad call though.** If you want to take your poker game to the next level, you need to develop the discipline to make these folds when

you know that there is no way that you are good. Don't moan and complain and linger on it. Just quickly hit the fold button and move on. The longer you tank, the worse you will make it on yourself.

I should mention however that there is one scenario where calling a river re-raise can be fine. Fish will sometimes mini-raise the river in a small pot with something silly like middle pair or top pair no kicker. It is fine to call here if you have TPGK or better. And also, it can be ok to call sometimes in spots with a very specific dynamic as discussed in the previous section or versus a maniac.

These spots are exceedingly rare though. In a decent sized pot, when facing a legit raise (3x or more), if you have a one pair or worse hand, you are almost certainly beat, regardless of your opponent's player type.

Make Sure Your Draw is to the Nuts

A common mistake made by players at the micros is drawing to a non nut hand. This brings up a situation called "reverse implied odds" where you are attempting to hit a hand that might be second best if you make it. This means that your reward for hitting your hand is losing a huge pot!

Example:



on,



is a classic example.

While it seems like a great spot to hit a rather hidden straight, the king might actually be a disaster card for you. Many low stakes players love to peel in these spots with ace high type hands such as,

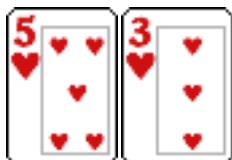


Incidentally, they were actually correct to peel with this hand here especially if it is a big multi-way pot with deep stacks. The potential payoff if the king comes is huge.

Here is another common spot.

Example:

In the BB you have,



in a big multi-way limped pot.

The flop comes,



This is a spot where you should be really careful about getting involved if there is any kind of significant action. I will sometimes just fold it outright on the flop to a big bet in fact. Oftentimes OOP here the only big action you are going to get when you make your hand is from a higher flush.

So always make sure that you double check your draws before you play them. Make sure that if you hit you can be confident that it will be the best hand. This situation will actually arise quite frequently at the micros due to the large amount of multi-way limped pots.

As a side note, the reverse is true as well. If you had the nut flush draw in the last example for instance, it might be worth sticking around for a big bet or two against several opponents as you might win a monster pot if the heart comes.

Raising Draws

Often referred to as semi-bluffing as well. Should you do it? Yes absolutely. But I kept this for a small section near the end of the book for a reason. You shouldn't be raising with your draws that often at these limits because you have much less fold equity than you think. What exactly is this fold equity thing that I have mentioned several times in this book?

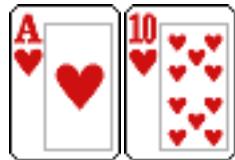
Fold equity is the added equity (think ownership or right to) of the pot that we can create by betting and getting them to fold. This works great in theory, if they fold. The problem at these stakes is that they don't fold that often.

So by raising a draw, which is usually a statistical underdog to a made hand (top pair etc), all we are doing is putting more money in the pot with the worst of it.

This doesn't mean that you should never raise with a draw. They won't always have a good made hand and they will still fold from time to time. Furthermore, you will sometimes have enough equity in the pot with your draw to raise for value. It will frequently gain you a free card on the turn as well.

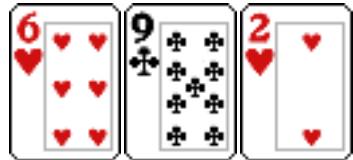
Example:

In MP you have,



You raise and get called by an SLP in the SB.

The flop comes,

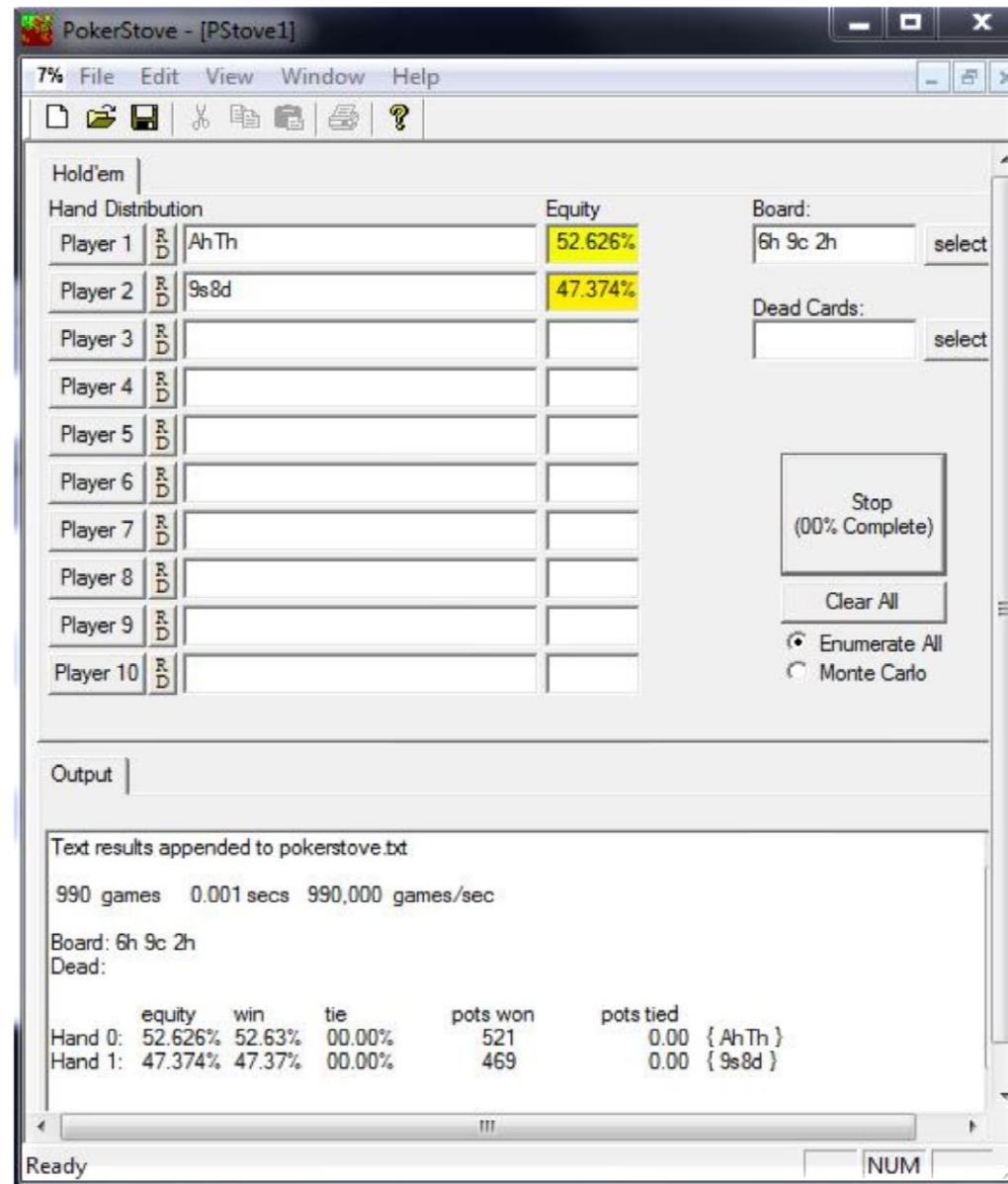


He donks into you for 1/2 the pot.

You should raise.

Even if he has some weak top pair type hand, we are actually a small favorite here.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes



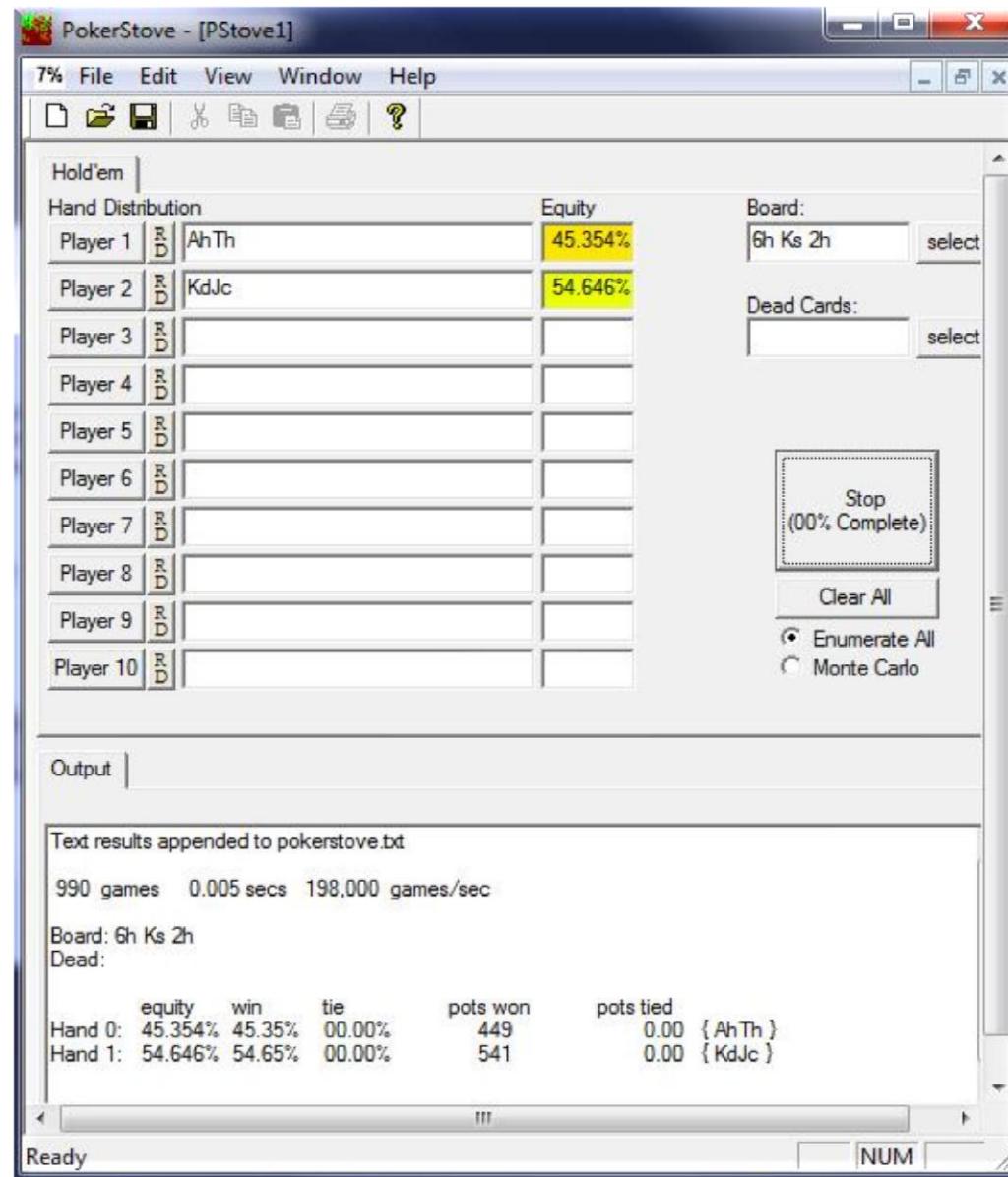
So not only do we have a slight edge here in immediate equity (53% to 47%), our opponent won't actually have a hand as strong as top pair here every time either. So we will get folds from time to time as well. Also, when we are called he will be much more inclined to check the turn, which allows us to check as well when we miss and take the free card. Therefore it is clearly +EV to raise here.

Let's find a closer spot. Imagine the flop in the above hand was this instead,



So now if we give our opponent the same kind of top pair type hand we can see that the percentages have changed a little bit.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes



We have lost a full 7% equity in the pot because we only have one over now instead of two. Should we still raise the flop? Probably, since he can still have a bunch of weaker pairs or air that might fold some of the time. Plus we will still get that free card on the turn a lot of the time when called. But it is a lot closer. And in the above situation if all we had was a naked flush draw with no overs, it might be best to just call on the flop as our equity will be even lower.

I hope the point of this section is fairly clear. Raising your draws is a great thing to incorporate into your game and makes you a much more difficult player to play against. However at these stakes you won't have nearly as much fold equity as you might think. And they aren't paying any attention to your image either.

You should still raise some of your draws, but only the good ones. As a rule of thumb I'd probably raise the 12 out or better draws and play a smaller pot with the others. There are other factors at play here such as your opponent's donk bet%. But as a rule I would play your draws a little bit slower at these stakes and of course go nuts when you hit.

Maniacs

Ah maniacs. Who doesn't love them? Whatever their reasons for playing crazy (high stakes player blowing off steam, 14th beer), we know that they are playing very erratically and aggressively. And they are spewing off money about as fast as possible. These types of players can routinely be found on microstakes tables especially on Friday and Saturday nights. The most extreme example of this is the "open shoving maniac."

The strategy advice here is pretty straightforward. Wait for a good hand and call. How good of a hand you should call with depends on your appetite for variance. Q7 is the average hand. So if you call with Q7 or better, against their completely random hand, you will profit in the long run. However you can reduce your variance by tightening up your range quite a bit more than that. I will usually call them with something like 66+ and A9o+. This range gives me a decent edge over them most of the time while not exactly waiting for aces either. And that

last point is an important one. You want to make sure that you get their money before somebody else does. If you don't lower your standards quite a bit, somebody else will and you will lose out on the fun.

However you always have to be aware of who is left to act as well. Sometimes you will need to fold a pretty good hand in EP (especially at a full ring table) like AJ or 99 against the maniac's shove because there are so many people left to act behind you. You don't want to put your stack on the line so easily against the more sane opponents. Use some discretion as well if you are deep and there are deep players left to act.

Most maniacs however just splash around a lot by raising or re-raising every hand and betting every street. Again, there isn't much in depth strategy advice to be offered here. Get a pair or a good draw and let them do the betting for the most part. You want to use their insane aggression against them. And it kind of goes without saying that you should not try to bluff these types of players under any circumstances.

My last bit of advice for dealing with maniacs is to limp re-raise them when you pick up a big hand. You can pretty much depend on a raise from these guys most of the time so limp re-raising allows you to get even more money in the middle. Make sure you check their 3bet% though. Often these guys will be min 3betting every hand as well. In that case it would be better to just make a normal raise and 4bet when it comes back to you.

When you notice one of these guys I suggest that you put that table off to the side and pay a little bit more attention to it. You really want to make sure that you are the one getting his money. There is nothing better for your winrate than free stacks.

Kings Preflop

This is another one of those common trouble spots for a lot of people. And like we have seen before, the reason why these spots cause such a stir is because they are close. There aren't any easy answers.

Can you fold KK preflop? Of course you can. Should you? Very, very rarely. The odds of somebody else having AA when you have KK are only 4% in full ring and 3% in 6max.

The thing that you always have to remember about cooler situations like this is that they are going to happen both for you and against you. You shouldn't worry too much about them because if the tables were turned (and they will be), your opponent would almost certainly lose all of his money as well.

I would go so far as to say that for 100bb or less you should almost never fold KK preflop. At NL10 and higher, 6max or full ring, it is basically unthinkable versus any opponent due to the increased preflop aggression in those games. In NL2 and NL5 cash games you will find some insane nits who literally only play premium hands. There is sometimes a time and a place for it versus them.

In the extremely rare situation in these games where the world's biggest nit cold 4bets you I can fairly confidently fold KK preflop for 100bb stacks. A "cold 4bet" is when there is a raise and a re-raise and then somebody who has not even acted yet in the hand makes a 4bet. Nobody at the micros is basically ever bluffing when they do this. It is AA or KK only.

But as we know, NL2 and NL5 are both games where you have the option to buyin deepstacked at the Pokerstars regular tables. Against a huge nit for 200bb+ I can get away from KK preflop as well.

The way I look at it is this. These situations (KK vs AA) happen very rarely but they do happen every once in awhile. I have a big edge over a player like this who is playing far too tight. While he could perhaps have AK or QQ, AA certainly makes up a decent chunk of his range here. I don't want to ship such a large amount of big blinds to a player this bad just because he managed to cooler the crap out of me.

You have to understand that with players this tight (who show up regularly at NL2 and NL5 tables) these sorts of situations are the only spots where they can make any money off of you. That or set over set. They have almost zero “plays” in their game. They are playing a ton of tables and basically playing their cards face up.

Make hero folds against them, especially when it is mega deep, and just move on. And be happy about it. Against all other player types, I pretty much just go broke with KK preflop. And by go broke I mean win a lot of money by shipping it in preflop and getting shown something worse most of the time.

Example: Blinds are 2c/5c. Stacks are 250bb effective.

In LP you have,



A Nit opens in MP to 20c and you 3bet to 70c.

He 4bets to \$2.

You should fold.

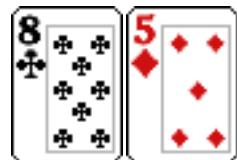
Limped Pots

It's about time I talked about these because you will see a lot of them at the micros. However, I left a discussion about limped pots for a small section near the end of the book because my advice is to not worry about them too

much. You should only get heavily involved in a limped pot if you have two pair or better. Often you will be OOP in a blind which makes things even worse. I see a lot of people regularly spewing in these kinds of spots. Don't let it be you!

Example:

In the BB you have,



The flop comes,



You check and a fish bets pot.

You should fold.

It is completely fine to just fold here. If you remember back to the planning out a hand section we talked about assessing the hand as a whole and not in a vacuum. Yes you have top pair but let's really break down this situation.

- You have no kicker, essentially.
- The board is very draw heavy and almost every card that falls on the turn that isn't an 8 or a 5 is going to be scary for you.
- You are OOP and will be guessing throughout the rest of the hand.

Always continuing on in spots like this is just throwing away money. You are not going to win these pots anywhere near as much as you think. Even if he just has two overs, he can still make your life miserable on later streets by bluffing high cards or betting when he hits. And you will have no idea what to do. Don't get sucked into putting a bunch of money in the middle in spots like this.

You should still stab at some limped pots under the right circumstances though. Let's consider another spot where we have a bit better of a hand.

Example:

In the BB you have,



And the flop comes,



You should check/call.

I would usually check this flop and call a bet. Leading out is ok as well although it depends on the number of opponents. I think it is hard to get called by worse that often though and I am not very keen to want to build a pot OOP with top pair no kicker.

If you check the flop instead, you create deception about your hand and give your opponent a chance to make a second best hand on the turn. You can also allow him to pick up a draw and charge him the maximum for it.

So for instance if the flop went check/check and the turn card was the,



I would bet pot. Most of the time when you are in a limped pot your opponents will be fish. Fish don't fold a heart draw or QT here. And they don't fold a jack either because they don't believe that you can have a king. They will call a pot sized bet just as readily as a half pot bet in either scenario.

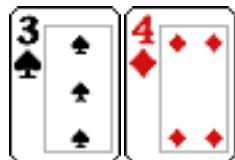
The river is pretty basic. You should check the majority of the time unless it comes a 2 or a king, simply because it is hard to get called by worse. Checking also induces worse hands to bluff. And the decision from there just goes back to the discussion about value calling in spots like this based on the player's AF and the river card.

Poker is all about manipulating the odds into your favor and by playing the hand in this manner, you have forced them to put in money with the worst of it at every step of the way.

Lastly regarding limped pots is the scenario where the SB open limps and you check the big blind. Now this shouldn't happen very often because if you remember I advocated that you raise with about 50% of your hands when someone does this. But that will still leave 50% of the time when you have some garbage hand and should just check. However this situation is a lot different from the previous two because you have position.

Example:

In the BB you have,



The flop comes,



The SB checks.

Now normally I would advocate betting in a spot like this if you catch any piece of the flop. But when you literally have nothing at all I would recommend that you check. You have almost no way to win the pot if called.

But if it gets checked to you again on the turn, you should bet regardless of what card comes. They will fold a large majority of the time. This just goes back to the idea that people don't check twice with anything good. In fact, usually they don't have anything at all when they do this. It is just a total white flag and you should make a small bet here and take it down.

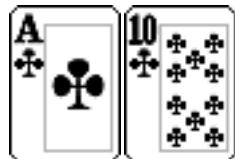
Min-Bets

You will see a lot of minimum bets in these games. And you need to approach them quite a bit differently than a normal bet. Min bets are almost always made by bad players who don't understand even the most basic mathematical concepts in poker. In fact they are a dead giveaway to a recreational player. You can give them the fish tag right away. Min bets create a situation where they are technically "betting" but it's kind of like the little dog who barks a lot. There is no bite behind it. We can correctly call with any two cards.

My basic approach versus min bets however is to just ignore them. If somebody min bets into me I will just pretend that they checked.

Example:

In LP you have,



You raise and get called by a fish in the BB.

The flop comes,



He leads for the minimum.

You should ignore this and make your standard 60% of the pot cbet.

Tilt

The 8000 pound elephant in the room. Tilt is a major component of this game but I wanted this book to be mostly concerned with strategy. But I would be remiss to write a poker book and not mention it at all. The reason why tilt is such a hard subject to approach however is because stopping it from happening is something that is really hard to teach. So much of it is real psychology. And I am by no means an expert in that area.

But it is something that anyone who plays poker seriously must work to overcome. I have been around this game a long time and I have seen so many otherwise really talented poker players just wreck themselves in brief moments of insanity. They usually do this by throwing away a bunch of buyins at their regular stakes. But often even more destructively by jumping stakes and playing heads up against a far superior clear thinking opponent.

The jumping stakes type of tilt will completely ruin your poker career. If this is a major problem for you, you are really going to have to take a step back and examine your goals in this game and develop a game plan for how to prevent this from happening. Many online poker rooms now allow you to restrict your play even down to specific limits. It would probably be a good idea to have a look at this before anything.

A more practical way for most people however is to implement what is called a stop loss. Basically what this means is that once you lose a certain amount of buyins at your regular stakes (maybe 3, 4 or 5) you must quit immediately. And I recommend just hitting the “X” on the poker lobby and closing all of your tables at once, even if you are in the middle of some hands somewhere. Then you must get up from the computer, leave the room and not play again that day.

You have to be prepared for what this game will throw at you from time to time. When you sit down to play poker you have to remind yourself that you signed up for this. You signed up to play a game that can have very, very

crazy and completely nonsensical swings in the short term. With the good also comes the bad. And it will be simply unbelievably at times. There is no point in trying to understand it because you won't. I have played well over 5 million hands of poker. Trust me, I don't get it yet either. I stopped trying to "get it" a long time ago.

We play this game because we win in the long term. You must always remind yourself of that. I like to put a graph of mine and set it as my desktop background. Or I will just load a graph in HEM while playing. No matter how bad it gets during a session I can always look at that pretty line going up and to the right and remind myself that those results are what is real, this session is not. Always remember that you can never play a statistically significant amount of hands in one session of poker. No matter how good or bad it gets, it is almost entirely meaningless in the grand scheme of things.

There is another way to reduce tilt. This involves giving up a little bit of immediate EV in order to lower your overall variance. This statement may sound absurd at first to some people but hear me out.

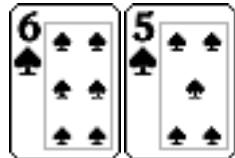
Imagine a hypothetical situation where you know that you are a slight favorite as the cards lie (say 55%) but your opponent wants to play for stacks right now and has gone all in. But further imagine that you have had a bad day and you know that if you lose this pot that it will be the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back and you will go on monkey tilt and spew off 3 stacks. The best play here then is obviously to fold.

Now this is kind of a silly example especially since we can rarely ever be 100% certain with some of these variables but I think you catch my drift. Tilt is a real thing that affects a lot of people in a big way. And you should be willing to go the extra mile to keep yourself off of it.

I will often play huge draws for instance in a more passive way at the micros for this very reason. And especially against bad players. Against good players I will be more likely to play them aggressively especially at higher stakes where balancing your ranges is much more important.

Example:

In LP you have,



You raise and get called by an SLP in the SB.

The flop comes,

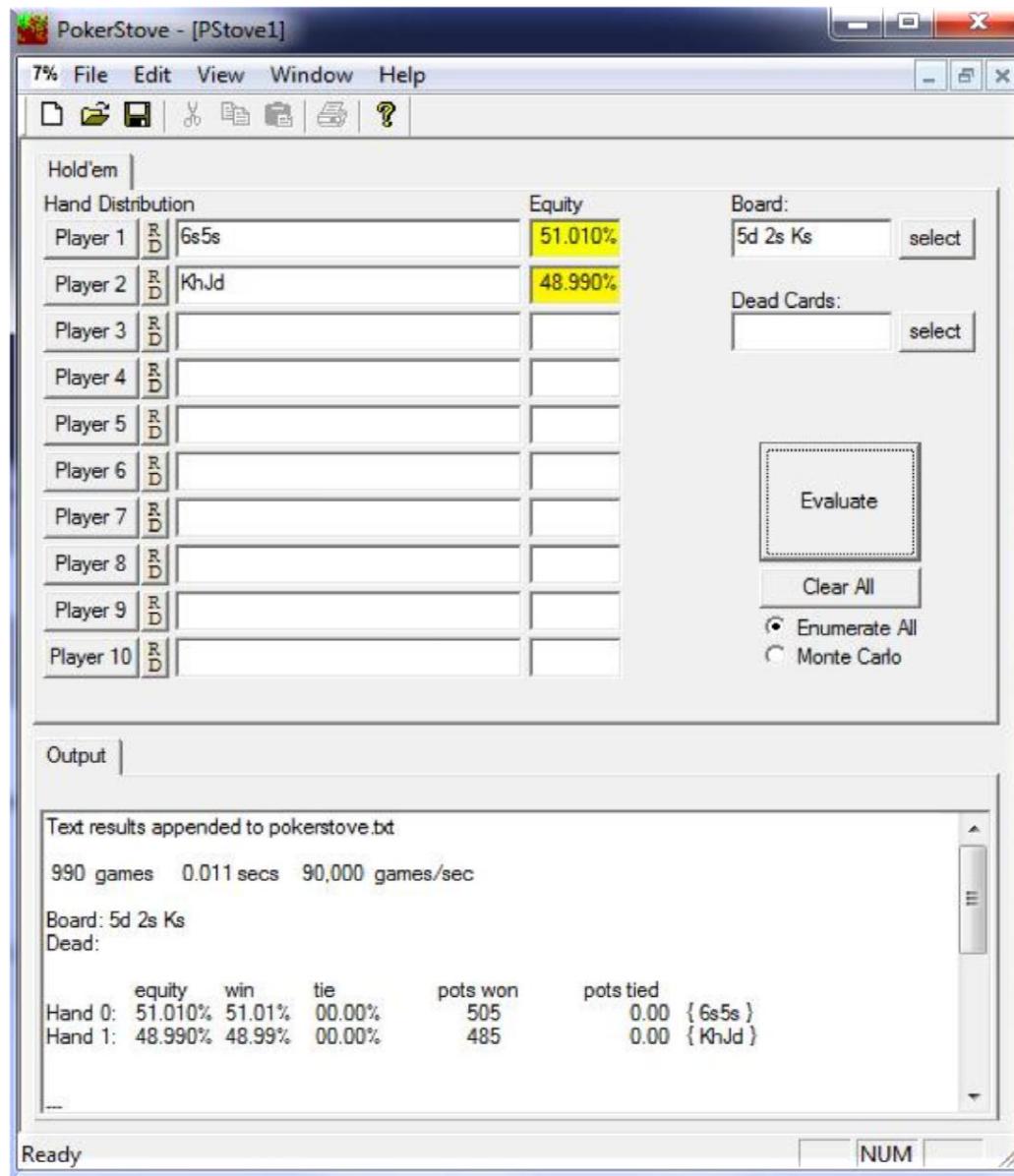


You cbet and he check/raises.

You should call.

Now if we assume that when this opponent raises us here that he has some sort of top pair type hand a lot of the time, we can see that we are a slight favorite in Pokerstove.

♣ Crushing The Microstakes



But let's further imagine that this player is never going to fold his KJ for any amount. This isn't a stretch at these limits. Most of the time they won't be willing to fold in a spot like this. If that is the case, then we have no fold equity.

So in a spot like this, instead of putting in a big raise here and playing a monstrous pot as a virtual coin flip, I will often just call and play a huge pot when I hit my draw. This keeps my variance low which in turn keeps my level of tilt low. I will happily pass up on that 1% edge in order to keep myself in a better state of mind.

This idea was also in mind when I suggested that you play a more passive game preflop in certain spots and not 3bet quite so much at these stakes. It is perfectly fine to pass up on a little bit of immediate EV in order to keep yourself as far away from tilt as possible. People vastly underestimate the impact of tilt and how damaging it can be to someone's poker career. This is a game played by people. It isn't all about odds and ratios and EV.

Some Final Words on Tilt

Ultimately there is no magic solution for tilt. As long as you are human, you are going to take this game personally at times and probably let it affect your play. I think that one of the biggest differences between the big winners and the breakeven or losing players however is that the former don't allow tilt to affect their game to anywhere near the same extent. **You have to develop a certain level of discipline to be successful in this game.**

If you really want to take this game seriously, and I absolutely believe that you do, or else you wouldn't have bought this book, then you are going to have to look long and hard at your tilt issues and find ways to minimize them.

You are going to have to learn to bite the bullet and make that fold, even though it feels like you have been folding for days on end. As I said near the beginning of this book, winning poker is largely just an exercise in

pain tolerance much of the time. Winning spurts are so infrequent and rare and they feel amazing. But the vast majority of the time when you play poker, all you will be doing is treading water. That is, you are trying not to give away what you made during that brief winning stretch.

A fold is fold no matter the circumstances. If you truly want to be successful in this game, look deep down and find a way to make the correct decision on a more consistent basis. Do not allow yourself to flip out and make silly plays.

You will never be perfect though. I certainly am not even though some people seem to think that I don't tilt or something. Truthfully I do. But I have become very good at not allowing it to have any noticeable impact on my play. Scream and curse, throw things (not the computer). Do whatever you have to do. Just make sure that you click the right button. And then quit playing for the day. Tomorrow is a new day, I promise!

Final Thoughts

I said at the beginning of this book that my goal was to impart the playbook in my head to the virtual ink here so that you could replicate my success. I guess how well I did in achieving that goal can only be determined after you go out and play a lot of hands of poker now.

Microstakes poker on the internet is a crazy game. Most people think that it is really easy and that everyone should breeze through it. And they aren't completely wrong. A lot of people do breeze through it. A lot don't though. And it's not the end of the world if you are in the latter category right now. Because these stakes offer a very cheap lesson in letting you know that you need to get better in certain areas. The microstakes are really just about developing the solid fundamentals that will take your game to the next level anyways.

I would actually prefer in some ways to be the guy who is struggling a bit out of the gate than the one who breezes through this. Because learning to really think about the logic behind this game is what will really help

you succeed later on. There is an answer to everything in poker. That is one of the biggest reasons why this is such a great game.

There are two main ways to get better at poker and neither of them are particularly easy or fast unfortunately. But such is life. First, you need to play a lot of hands. And I really do mean a lot. Hours upon hours every day and multi-tabling if at all possible. If there is one thing that you consistently find in all the best players out there, it is that they have seemingly played more hands than everybody else. It seems like they are always playing!

But there are a lot of people out there who have played millions of hands as well and are still breakeven or “rakeback pros.” This is where the second most important component for your improvement comes in; ruthless study. Now that you have a big sample size you need to pour over that data in HEM or PT, mess with filters and find out where you are having problems. You need to study the elite players at your limit, figure out the good things that they are doing and incorporate them into your own game.

You might want to hire a coach or join a training site as well. But you can't approach either of these as a passive spectator. If you really want to get the best out of either of these learning tools, then you will need to put in some effort yourself. And really, this means taking notes and studying them later. Don't just watch a video, jot down 3 or 4 main points that were covered. After a coaching session do the same thing. Keep them in a file on your computer or pinned to your wall and look over them on a regular basis.

Finally, you need to develop your own strategy and play style in response to what you have seen at the tables. The best players are constantly developing the cutting edge strategies that keep changing how this game is played. Then everybody else eventually copies what they do. But it is always the proactive ones, the ones who came up with the idea in the first place that profit the most. You see this in so many other areas of life as well. You don't become highly successful at anything by blindly following somebody else's path.

Hopefully a lot of the suggestions in this book will be useful to compliment or help you build your own game. But if there is one thing that I hope you take away from this book more than anything it is that **you need to learn to think through this game for yourself**. Most of the strategies offered in this book, especially the NL2 ones, I

created. And I used them with great success for a long time while getting laughed at. Eventually they stopped laughing at me and started copying me.

And that is why I stressed the importance of learning the logic behind some of my crazy bet size recommendations. It wasn't so that you will have the best winrate ever at NL2. That's great if that happens, but really the point was to get you thinking about the game on a deeper level. There are no cookie cutter solutions in poker. Every opponent and every hand offers a new challenge.

Listen to good players, read books, join training sites etc. But at the end of the day, decide for yourself what works and what doesn't. If what works happens to be the same as the advice that you got, then so be it. If it is different then don't be afraid to disagree with them and play it your way.

Listen, but don't listen too much. You've got to always remember that 80% or more of the people who play this game lose money in the long run after the rake. But every one of them will be more than willing to offer you their opinion. Not all opinions are created equal!

And lastly, again, just play a lot. When you think you have played a lot, play some more. Then open up your database program and look over your session, especially your big losing hands. Then go play some more. Bookmark some time for some overall study of your game in HEM or PT at least once a week for an hour or so once you have played a lot of hands. Mess with filters relentlessly. Find out where you are spewing the money and where you can improve.

Give up that TV show. Make the time. This is the only way to success in this game. Like anything in life you have to want it more than the next guy. As I said at the beginning of this book this game isn't the heart pounding, adrenaline filled non-stop excitement that they try and make people believe it is on TV. Those are heavily edited main event final tables where they will show 10 hands out of about 10 hours of play.

A real professional or even a good semi-pro knows that in order to have success in this game you need to think about it like any other job. In a way it is kind of like running a small business. It comes with a lot of benefits such

as control over your own results and the freedom to set your own hours. But it doesn't give you a free pass to just goof around at the tables whenever you want and hope things will turn out your way.

You are going to have to put in the hours, really put them in. You are going to have to make time to study and study hard. You are going to have to learn how to be disciplined at the tables. You are going to have to learn how to make a lot of folds even when it seems like you have been folding forever. You are going to have to put up with a lot of really ugly days and sometimes weeks and months. You are going to have to become a machine at the tables. This is a job and that is how the big money is made in online poker.

I did say big money though. And I did mention freedom and control as well. Beyond all the drawbacks to professional or semi-professional poker there are a couple of enormous positives as well. Positives so big that they make all the other stuff seem inconsequential for a lot of people. Big time success in this game is not for everybody and it has to be that way. But for a select few who want it bad enough, they will get it.

Whatever your goals are in this game your road to success starts here at the micros. I hope I have made that path a little bit clearer for you.

Thank You

I want to thank you for purchasing and reading this book. I could not have done it without all of the amazing support that I receive from many of you on a regular basis. This book is a piece of me but it was written for you. My greatest hope is that the information contained within it will take your game to the next level.

If you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to shoot me an [email](#) or get in touch on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

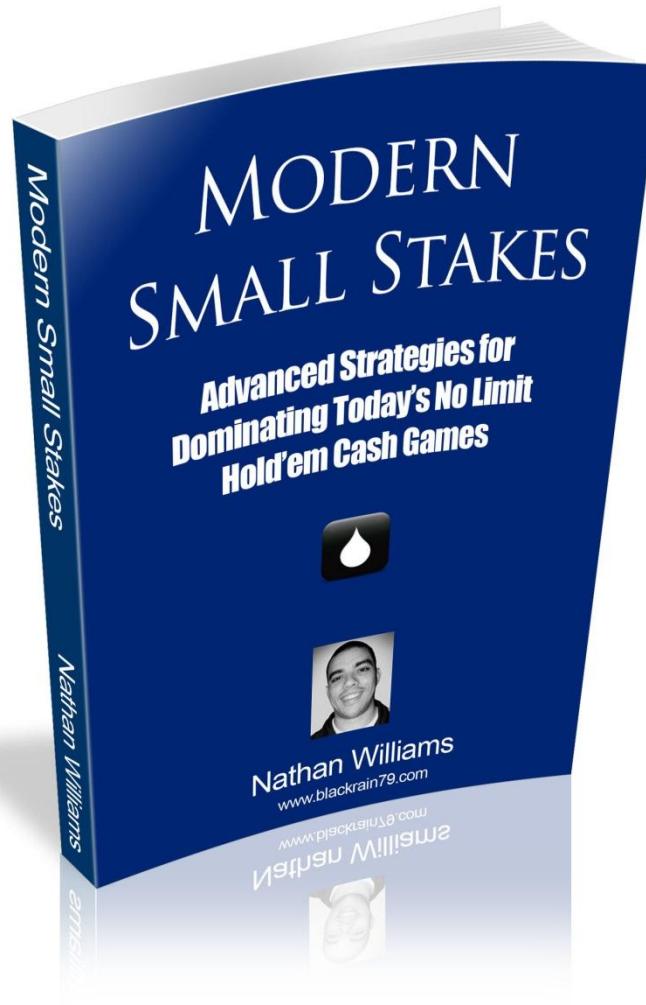
Also, you can join my [free newsletter](#) for the most up to date strategy advice on the micros delivered right to your inbox.

Lastly, small independent publishers such as myself rely heavily on feedback and word of mouth for sales. Please leave your honest thoughts about this book in the 2+2 thread for it located [here](#).

All the best at the tables,

Nathan "BlackRain79" Williams





Modern Small Stakes is the follow-up work to Crushing the Microstakes. Focusing on higher stakes (NL10, NL25 and NL50), it is a massive guide to dominating in these tougher games. To learn more click [here](#).

Glossary

24-table

- Refers to the maximum amount of tables that Pokerstars allows a user to play at once.

Action

- A general gambling term referring to placing bets against someone.

Air

- Having nothing at all.

BB

- Big blind.

Barrel

- Fire multiple bets at a pot.

Big bet

- Twice the big blind.

Blinds

- Forced preflop bets in hold'em meant to initiate action.

Bluffing

- Betting with absolutely nothing. Not to be confused with a flop cbet however.

Button

- The most favorable spot at the poker table. Get to act last on every single street.

Buyin

- The amount of money brought to the table in a cash game.

Cbet

- Continuation bet. Usually made on the flop to continue on with the preflop aggression.

CO

- Cutoff. The second most favorable spot at the poker table. One off the button.

Downswing

- Lots of short term bad luck and losing.

Dynamic

- The recent history between you and your opponent.

Effective stack size

- The smallest stack size involved in the hand. This is “effectively” the stack size for all players.

EP

- Early position.

Equity

- Percentage to win. Ownership or stake in the pot.

EV

- Expected Value. A term derived from mathematics referring to the anticipated monetary results of certain poker decisions.

Extraction

- Getting the most out of your big hands.

Fish

- Someone who is playing far too many hands and usually in a very passive manner as well.

Fold equity

- Added stake in the pot that you get by forcing somebody to fold.

Grinder

- Somebody who plays a lot of poker. Usually a nit or TAG.

HJ

- Hijack. The third most favorable position at the poker table. Two off the button.

Image

- How your opponents view you.

Implied odds

- How much you stand to win if you make your hand.

IP

- In position, last to act.

LAG

- Loose and aggressive. A player who plays a lot of hands and plays them aggressively.

Light

- Refers to weak or not so great holdings.

Line

- Course or plan of action in a poker hand.

Long run

- Over 100k hands of poker.

LP

- Late position.

Maniac

- Someone who is playing far too many hands and playing them far too aggressively as well.

MP

- Middle position.

Multi-table

- Play multiple tables of online poker at once.

Nit

- A player who plays very tight and waits for the nuts.

Nuts

- The best hand possible or close to it.

OOP

- Out of position, first to act.

Perceived range

- The perception or belief about what range of hands a particular player may have.

Postflop

- Refers collectively to the 3 betting rounds in Texas Hold'em known as the flop, turn and river.

Pot control

- Controlling the size of the pot by not betting, usually done on the turn.

Preflop

- The initial betting round in Texas Hold'em before the community cards are dealt.

Rakeback

- Most online poker rooms offer to return to their players a certain percentage of the rake that they have paid. This can be a substantial income for some.

Range

- The spectrum of different hands that someone can have.

Regular

- Nit or TAG. Somebody who you frequently see at the tables.

SB

- Small blind.

Semi-bluffing

- Bluffing with plenty of outs, such as a straight draw.

Short run

- Less than 100k hands of poker.

SLP

- Semi loose passive. A common player at the micros who plays a little bit too loose and is fairly passive.

SPR

- Stack to pot ratio. The effective stack size compared to the size of the pot.

Stab

- Taking a shot at the pot.

Sticky

- Someone who doesn't fold that often.

TAG

- Tight and aggressive. A good player who plays relatively tight and aggressively in the right spots.

Tilt

- Erratic or emotional decision making.

TPGK

- Top pair good kicker.

TPTK

- Top pair top kicker.

UTG

- Under the gun. Referring to the positions directly to the left of the blinds.

Value

- You think that you are ahead, betting because you want your opponent to call.

Variance

- Another term derived from mathematics referring to the natural ups and downs of poker.

Winrate

- Big blinds won per 100 hands (bb/100). Also often referred to as big bets won per 100 hands (BB/100).

Wet

- The board has one or more flush draws on it.