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Online No-Limit Texas Hold'em Poker  
for Beginners



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## Introduction

If you are reading this, I am guessing you've seen the WSOP on ESPN and have said to yourself, "That looks like fun" and now are ready to try your hand at a bit of Poker. This is a very common thought as, more and more, Poker has made it into our lives.

If Hollywood had held off, and released the movie Rounders, starring Matt Damon and Ed Norton today; it would be a blockbuster. Poker has taken over sports television that used to be reserved for lesser-known sports like skeet, and inline hockey. Poker isn't just for the bad time slots anymore. The WSOP is shown in prime time on ESPN. This is time ESPN used to use for Major League Baseball.

The question that I have heard asked is, "Why is poker so popular now?" It is true. The WSOP has been held for 30+ years. ESPN has been around for 25 years, yet, all of a sudden, there is poker on all the time.

The reason is the Internet. Folks no longer have to travel to a card club, or a casino, or Vegas or wherever to get a game of poker. Also, they don't have to schedule their poker play around their friends' schedules. With the Internet, anyone with a few bucks can head to an online poker room and play with complete strangers any time of the day or night. At PartyPoker.com, it is rare to see the number of people on the site less than 15,000 at any given time. And that is just one site.

Another reason poker is so popular now is the "hole card camera" that they use on TV. The camera is used to see what cards the "best" players in the world are holding, and how they play them. This is intriguing, and educational. You can learn the game by watching. Television gives us that education.

A third reason for Poker's explosion in popularity is the game itself. No-limit Texas Hold'em is what is advertised and played on TV in the WSOP and the WPT. This is THE game. This game is a different animal altogether. It is not 5-card or 7-card stud. It is definitely not Omaha.

Everyone only gets two cards. Then they all use the 5 community cards to see who has the best hand. With everyone holding so few cards in secret, there is a very FINITE amount of hands that can be made with the community cards. Hands that are any good that is. More importantly, possible hands that can beat your hand.

The game itself is genius. It is simple. It is easy enough to know if you have the best hand possible. It is also a game that can be played with a lot of skill, and a bit of luck.

The final reason for poker's current popularity is that the general masses finally see the game as a skill game. A sport. It isn't exactly gambling. Most folks look at playing cards, playing poker, as gambling. Or they used to. With all the media attention devoted to No-Limit Texas Hold'em, the general public is finally figuring out that this is a game of skill, not luck. If you get better at your skills, you will be a better player. You can work to hone your skills, to "think correctly" throughout a game.

I hate to mention Rounders again, but quoting Matt Damon, "Why does this still seem like gambling to you? I mean, why do you think the same five guys make it to the final table of the World Series of Poker EVERY SINGLE YEAR? What, are they the luckiest guys in Las Vegas? It's a skill game, Jo." While that isn't exactly true anymore, as the number of folks entering that tournament has more than tripled in the last year, increasing the odds of getting unlucky, it still reinforces the point about Hold'em being a skill game.

Next in importance is the stage that the media shows us. It only shows us tournaments. We all know that "gambling" is "morally" wrong. Or you should know. That is, if you ever went to church, you heathen. (smirk) Television doesn't show us the bad side of the gambling lifestyle. The guy that goes down to the card club with a cap of \$100, loses a lot, hits the cash machine twice, and leaves down \$400. This is the morally wrong side to poker, and gambling in general.

What the media shows us now is tournament poker. Specifically Hold'em. There is a set buy-in. The chips aren't real money, they are just chips. If you lose all your chips, you are out. Game over. If you win all the chips, you are the winner and collect the top prize. There is no going to the cash machine and trying to "win it back". The game that is presented on television is in a buy-in format, and when you are out, you are out.

Granted, the buy-in for the WSOP is \$10,000, but there are many ways around paying that. PokerStars.com hosts many satellite tournaments to win your way into the WSOP. As you probably know, PokerStars.com put 316 qualifiers into the WSOP in 2004. The winners in 2003 & 2004, Chris Moneymaker and Craig Raymer, both qualified through PokerStars.com. Neither of them paid anywhere CLOSE to \$10,000 to win their millions.

Your dreams can come true playing poker. And you can have fun doing it.

"Enough blather already, get to the information", I hear from the back of the class. Okay. It's time to get down to business.

## **This Book, Defined**

I am writing this as a tool for beginner Texas Hold'em players. Specifically, online. Specifically, No-Limit. Specifically, low buy-in. Playing low buy-in "sit and go"(SNG) games is the BEST way to learn no-limit Texas Hold'em.

Why? It is real money. It is exactly what they play on TV. I am going to show you how to play the game "correctly". This is the way I have learned to play through trial-and-error, thousands of hands, and most importantly, a LOT of reading in books and on the Internet.

There are a few good books dedicated to No-Limit Texas Hold'em. Most significantly, Doyle Brunson's "Super System". At the end of this book, I give you a short synopsis of "Super System". I also tell you exactly how reading "Super System" has added to my game. MUCH of what I teach in this book was first put down on paper in "Super System".

There are TOMES devoted to Limit Hold'em and how to play that. . I am not going to go over books that deal with Limit Hold'em. It's been covered.

I feel there is a void that needs to be filled to teach beginners of the game how to maximize their chances of playing winning No-Limit Hold'em. I am hoping this is that guide. The "strategies" I reveal here can, and are, used at all levels of No-Limit Texas Hold'em. I put the word "strategies" in quotes, as this is the keyword used in all the Hold'em help pages and books I have seen and read.

What I am going to tell you isn't really a "strategy", it's the correct way to play. It's the unwritten, "Rules of the Game", if you will. These rules are what this book is all about. These rules are the correct way to play, to give you the best odds of winning.

## What You Will Learn

The book will progress as follows:

- ❑ Define the differences between No-Limit and Limit Hold'em for the beginning player
- ❑ Getting started with your online experience
- ❑ Commonly used Poker Definitions
- ❑ How to play with the odds in your favor.
- ❑ Specific hands, and how to play them.
- ❑ Odds Chart, and a couple of Starting Hands Charts.
- ❑ Playing in Position
- ❑ Bluffing
- ❑ Bad Beats
- ❑ End Game

The most important lessons I will go through are playing in position, and the end game.

When you are finished with this book you WILL be a better player. For the absolute beginner, it will be like the blind finally being able to see. That's how I felt when I learned a few of the tricks of the trade. You will too. So, if you've thrown away some cash already online, and decided that you are just no good at the game, read on.

Enlightenment starts now.

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### Limit vs. No-Limit

The only things that Limit and No-Limit Hold'em have in common are the number of cards and how they are dealt. That's it. After that, the differences are night and day.

There have been many books written about the ins and outs of limit Hold'em.

Limit is the kind of game you see when you go to your local card club or casino. The 2/4, 3/6, 10/20 games. Limit Hold'em is a game of playing good hands, and hopefully preying on "fish". You really need to know your odds tables, your pot odds, and have a good poker face. Limit Hold'em is "great for beginners" and is often referred to as "No Fold'em Hold'em".

You do not see this version of Hold'em on TV. In case you didn't know, at most card clubs, the LEAST expensive table you may be able to get on is the 2/4 table. What that means is the blinds are \$1, \$2, the pre-flop and flop bets are \$2, and the turn and river bets are \$4. Each betting round can only be raised a maximum of 4 times.

It can get expensive, especially for a beginner who is playing incorrectly. On the other side of things, you can almost always see all the cards as there is really no way for the other guy to force you out. That is if it's down to two of you. He raises \$2 on the flop. You call. Turn card. He raises \$4. You call. He raises \$4 on the river. You call. There is really no way to bluff a guy out since you can't keep raising.

Or maybe you already made your hand on the flop, want to collect the pot, and don't want to see any more cards. Yet the guy you are up against keeps calling, and can eventually make a better hand. When your hand is made, you don't want to see any more cards.

In Limit, you can't really deter someone from seeing all the cards. This is also why, in Limit, you NEED to play the best hands. AA, KK, QQ, or AK. Suited preferably.

In No-Limit, you CAN deter someone from seeing more cards. You CAN throw money at the pot to do so. In Limit, oftentimes, there is only one way to win. Have the best hand. In No-Limit, there are 2 ways to win every hand. Have the best hand, OR make everyone else fold.

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This is done through raising. And raising again. Phil Hellmuth once called No-Limit Hold'em, "Playing chess with a sledgehammer." That's about right.

As I said, there are TONS of books that cover Limit Hold'em. It is said it is best for beginners, because you can learn the ins and outs of the game without losing a "lot" of money. This is a farce, because to the beginner, an Ace-8 off-suit hand looks pretty good. They have an ace! Without some luck, they aren't going to win with that hand.

At a \$2/\$4 table, that could cost the beginner upwards of \$60 if he decided the pair of aces he flopped was the best hand out there and decided to raise each bet to the cap. The beginner is thinking, "It's a wonder this other dumbass keeps raising my raises. Boy is he going to be surprised when we turn these over and I have a pair of them. I can't wait to see the look on his face."

What Joe Beginner doesn't realize, is most "good" Limit players won't even play a hand unless they have AA, KK, AK, QQ, AQ, AJ, and even A10. What Joe Beginner is up against is someone else that owns an ace, AND the kicker. Joe might get lucky, and catch the 8 and have 2-pair. Or the board could fill up, and there will be a split, but more often than not, he is drawing dead.

In Limit Hold'em, it really comes down to how good your starting hands are. Then after that, it's determining pot odds against hand odds to see whether you should stay in, or get out. You really can't bluff, and it's VERY tough to steal pots.

Most importantly, they don't play it on TV.

No-Limit on ESPN is what got you interested in Poker, and that is why you are reading this. I hope. "No fold'em" Hold'em is a good game. At the higher blinds, it is just as competitive, and that is where most "poker professionals" make their money.

Playing 10/20 or 20/40 is a good way to make money to live off of if you know what you are doing. You absolutely HAVE to play good starting hands if you are throwing in a 20-spot, or more, each bet. You do, because at that level, you KNOW the other guy is playing a good starting hand. There aren't going to be a lot of guys at the table of a 10/20 game that will play 9 7 os, without being in the big blind.

As I said, there are many books about the subject of limit Hold'em. All the big players, Brunson, Sklansky etc. have them out for your reading pleasure. If you are a beginner, ANYTHING you read on the subject of poker will make you a better player. Reading is great, but playing is kind of like on the job training. And it's a lot more fun.

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### Definitions

I am going to define some terms that I will be using throughout the rest of the book. These definitions will make reading about, and learning poker, a LOT easier. I'm sure you know most of the terms, but if you don't, take the time to read through them, or just refer back to them later if you don't understand something I say later on in the book.

**FLOP**: The three community cards that are turned over after the initial round of betting.

**TURN**: The 4<sup>th</sup> community card. Also known as Fourth Street.

**RIVER**: The 5<sup>th</sup> and last community card. Also known as Fifth Street.

**SUITED**: Two or more cards of the same suit, i.e. Clubs, Spades, Hearts, Diamonds. In poker literature, suited is noted with a small "s". As in, Ace-King suited would be, "A Ks".

**OS**: The abbreviation for off-suit. Also can be abbreviated o. As in A9os, or A7o.

**CONNECTOR**: Two cards that are within 4 cards of each other so as to possibly make a straight. AK, JT, A2 are all connectors, as are Q8, 62, etc. The connectors that are "touching each other", i.e., JT, 78, are better to have as they can pick up the straight on the low, and high side. There are no gaps between them.

**SUITED CONNECTORS**: Same as a connector, only suited also. 87s for example. These are powerful cards as you have the straight, the flush, and the straight flush in play, pre-flop. These cards usually give you a lot of "outs".

**OUTS**: The number of cards that are theoretically left in the deck to complete your hand, or give you "the nuts". Outs coincide with Hand Odds to give you your percentage chance of drawing the, hopefully, winning card.

**THE NUTS**: A Poker term for the best hand possible in a given hand. You are always hoping to get The Nuts. You can't lose if you have the "Nut Hand". Unless you fold. Used as an adjective in terms such as "Nut Flush", "Nut Straight", and "Nut Trips".

**HAND ODDS**: The odds of getting the card that completes your hand. This is a theoretical number at best, but it gives you something to go by, to see if the pot is worth it to try drawing the card you need.

**AA**: Notation for aces as your starting hand. Also known as Pocket Rockets or Bullets. The best starting hand in Hold'em.

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**AK**: Ace-King or Ace-King suited (AK s). Nickname is “The Big Slick”.

**FULL BOAT or BOAT**: A full house.

**POT ODDS**: The % worth you are getting for your bet. If it only costs you \$10 to possibly win \$100, you are getting “10-1 Pot Odds”. This term is more used in Limit Hold ‘em than No-Limit.

**SIT ‘N GO (SNG)**: A 1-table game where everyone gets the same amount of chips for a set buy-in. The game is played in tournament format with increasing blinds every 10 hands. 10 to a table at PartyPoker, 9 at PokerStars. Top 3 spots win money.

**RING GAME**: A table where the same folks play the same poker for the same blinds all the time. People can get up and leave at any time, and new folks can come in. You can also re-buy in if you are out of money. This is the kind of game most often played at card clubs.

**MULTI-TABLE**: A poker tournament that includes more than one table. As people are eliminated, everyone moves down to one, final table.

**SATELLITE**: A tournament, often a qualifier, held online to get into a bigger tournament that is held LIVE in a casino. For online play, any tournament can be considered a satellite tournament, as no one is actually playing “together”. Each satellite is someone playing from the comfort of his/her home.

**HOME GAME**: A game of poker played between you and your friends. Often there is a lot of bluffing; everyone stays in to see every card, and lower stakes. Not exactly “real” poker.

**POSITION**: The spot on the table where you are sitting in relation to the dealer “button”. To the left of the button are the small blind and big blind. The first 4 or 5 spots are said to be in “early position”. The person on the button is in the best position, because he gets to see how everyone else has bet when it finally comes to his turn. On the button and two to the right are said to be in “late position”. All other spots, in a 9 or 10 person ring, are said to be “middle position”. Playing “In Position” is the single-most important poker skill that beginners lack, or understand. Early position is bad, late position is good.

**UNDER THE GUN (UTG)**: The first position after the big blind. It is the first position to bet before the flop and the 3<sup>rd</sup> to bet after the flop. Designated position #3 in this book.

**POT COMMITTED**: If you have put a lot of chips into a pot, you are said to be pot committed. Pot committed is a fallacy, and should not be used as an excuse.

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**TILT/ TILTED:** A player is said to be “on tilt” after they start betting crazy. Usually after having taken a bad beat. You need to learn to control your emotions and avoid going on tilt.

**BAD BEAT:** A bad beat is when you lose a hand you were leading and the other guy catches a card against all odds. Taking bad beats often leads to elimination, or more often, playing on tilt.

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### Playing Online

So here it is. I am finally going to get to it. Online Poker playing is by far the easiest way to play. No schedules to coordinate. You don't have to get dressed. You don't need to smell good, or hope that the guy next to you doesn't, literally, stink when you finally sit down at the casino tables.

Playing poker online is a great hobby. Granted, there are inherent risks, such as losing all your money to better players. But once you finally "get it" and play well, you always expect to win when you sit down.

Let's get started.

There are two sites that I currently recommend. PartyPoker.com and PokerStars.com. Both of these establishments, from what I've seen, run fair, easy to use sites. I primarily play at PartyPoker, and all my references will be for that site.

I would love to play at PokerStars.com though. If you get some luck, and play well, they have MANY satellite tournaments for WSOP qualifying. As said earlier, 316 players of the 2600+ at the WSOP qualified through PokerStars.com. The past 2 WSOP winners play, and qualified, at PokerStars.com.

If you are looking for a relatively inexpensive way to "maybe" qualify for the WSOP, PokerStars is the site you should check out.

They also have \$.01/.02 (one cent/two cent) games of limit Hold'em. It's like playing for play money, only there is a bit of cash on the line, so it's a bit more realistic. The stats they keep are awesome too. It is a great site, and fast becoming the #1 site for poker.

Which leads me to PartyPoker.com.

PartyPoker IS the #1 site online for Poker. Any and ALL poker. 24/7/365 you can find a game, especially at the lower buy-ins. This site is simple on the eyes, and runs, pretty much, glitch-free.

There are only a couple of things I dislike about PartyPoker. I dislike that their lowest end sit 'n go (SNG) game is \$5+1, and their lowest limit game is \$.50/\$1. At PokerStars, you can literally play for pennies while you learn. Plus, PokerStar's SNG games are all right in line. The \$5 is \$5+.50, the ten-dollar is \$10+1. PartyPoker is \$10+1, and the five-dollar game is \$5+1. What that means is that you are giving \$1 to the house in the five and the ten-dollar SNG's at PartyPoker, whereas PokerStars only takes 10%. Plus PokerStars only has 9 people at a table, whereas PartyPoker has 10. One less guy to knock out makes a BIG difference. That ends what I dislike about PartyPoker.

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As you can see, it isn't much.

### **Sit 'n Go (SNG) with Play Money**

Since SO many beginners start at PartyPoker, it is a great place to make money.

You know that at the lower levels, you have a fighting chance, even if you picked up the game yesterday. Odds are, 2 or 3 others at your table did too. I highly recommend PartyPoker as your first destination.

The next thing you do when you get there is hit the PLAY MONEY area. Go to their tournaments, and play a whole bunch of No-Limit SNG's. The SNG I will be referring to most often is a No-Limit, one table, everybody pays the same buy-in and gets the same amount of chips, tournament. The SNG ends when one guy has all the chips.

Play a LOT of games here. Not just to get used to the interface, and where the buttons are, and what they do, but also to work on the gameplay you will learn through this book. Work on your game. Work on your techniques. Pretend that you care. Pretend that it is real money.

I say this because once you play with real money; you won't be able to go back to the play money. Not because it's so "fun" to play with real money. It's because the gameplay becomes more "real" and predictable the higher up you go. The more money the folks at the table pay in, the more they care about the outcome. You will notice as you switch games, up and down the ladder, how different it is at each level.

Don't take too much stock in the play money games. If you know what you are doing though, you should flat-out win most of them. Even with the erratic betting you will see. You will take more bad beats at the play money area than anywhere else; so don't let it make you gun-shy.

Fortunately for the play money games, the end game is the same regardless of how much money you paid, or didn't, up front. People still want to win the game when it gets down to 3 or 4 whether it's at \$100+10 or 0+0. Thankfully, this will give you a LOT of practice that is universal to SNG games. I will guess that you won't be able to get away with stealing the blinds, uncontested, for as long in the \$100+10 games as you do in the \$5+1.

In the play money SNG games, some asshole is going to go all-in on the first hand every time. You are welcome to chase him and take his chips if you have AA, KK, AKs or QQ. These are the only hands I would suggest going in with, as there will be other callers also. If you don't have any of these, don't even play the first hand. Fold it away, and watch to see who has the large stack when it's all sorted out.

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The only thing good about this is you get to practice against a larger stack. With his 1600-2400 against your 800, you should still be good enough to take him by the end of the game. Maybe sooner.

If folks think the players in the \$5+1 games are bad, imagine how bad the players are playing for free? If they were any good, they'd try to win money.

Spend a few hours to days down in the play money SNG area. Once you are winning, or finishing top 3 just about every time, except when you take a bad beat, then you are ready to move up and make some money.

That is how I advise cutting your teeth. Read the rest of this book, and then hit the play money area. If you win your first 3 or 4 SNG's, you know it's time to move up.

The competition gets a lot stiffer, and the players a lot tighter, the more you move up.

A friend of mine got sick of playing the lower buy-in games because the play was still so erratic. So, he tried out, just for fun, the \$200+20 table. Everything he did on that table made sense. He would raise to get someone out of the pot, and they would fold. He'd represent something, and folks at the \$200 would respect that, and bow out to fight again later.

At the lower levels, SOMEONE will almost always call you to "keep you honest". Playing the \$200 SNG's, he won 3 times that first day and was up over 2 grand.

I am not saying to go straight to the big money because it's an easier game. It's a more "predictable" game. At the \$5 level, you still have a lot of fish, and they will catch crappy hands against you. There are a lot of rules to live by at the lower levels that you don't need to apply at the higher levels.

It's a different game.

But, hey, it's only a \$6 entry fee, and an hour later, you could have \$25 to show for it. That's \$19 per hour. If you could do it every time, you'd have yourself a nice little side job.

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# No-Limit Hold'em

## The Basics

Well, you've read this far and haven't learned a thing about strategy, technique, what a flop is, etc. etc. etc. Now it is time to impart some knowledge. I am going to assume that you know how to play. If not, I will touch on it briefly.

Actually, you should just head to the Play Money area mentioned above and learn the game. Or turn on ESPN or ESPN2 and look for WSOP re-runs. For those that still don't know, here is a very simple way of explaining Hold 'em.

There are up to 10 people at a table. The dealer "button" goes around the table in a clockwise motion. The player sitting to the left of the player with the button is in the small blind, and the player to the left of him is in the big blind. The small blind, and the big blind pay in. The small blind is  $\frac{1}{2}$  as much as the big blind.

Everyone is then dealt 2 cards face down. There is a round of betting starting with the player "under the gun", or, to the left of the big blind. Once all bets are made and called, three cards are dealt face up on the table. This is the flop. All the cards face-up are community cards and can be used by all players.

Another round of betting. A fourth card is then turned up. This is the turn card. Or 4<sup>th</sup> street. Another round of betting. Then the 5<sup>th</sup> and final card. This is the river card, as in; your hopes just went down the river. Also known as 5<sup>th</sup> street. Another round of betting.

If there are any folks left with cards, they turn them over to see who won. Simple game.

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# Starting Hands

## Getting Started with a Good Hand

There are good hands, and there are bad hands. There are hands that play well with others, and hands that want to play alone. In almost all the Limit Hold'em books, the "experts" say to only start with the top hands. That being AA, KK, QQ, AKs, TT, AQs, AJs. If you only play these top hands, and play them correctly, you will take down more pots, and win more often.

Unfortunately, in an SNG game, or tournament hold 'em, the blinds go up every 15 minutes, or every 10 hands in SNG games. If you are waiting and waiting for those BEST hands, eventually, the blinds will dig into you. What you need to recognize, as a good player, is what a good hand looks like. Or, more importantly, how much it is worth.

There has been a ton of research done on starting hands. Sklansky and Malmuth put out hand rankings and how to play them in the 1980's. Since the advent of advanced computing, a college kid for his thesis redid the rankings and offers EXCELLENT explanations as to why and what to play.

The website is: <http://www-2.cs.cmu.edu/People/mummert/poker/> There is enough information there to make your head swim. Here are the rankings of the hands that he came up with:

- Group 1:** Hands 1-5: AA, KK, QQ, JJ, AKs
- Group 2:** Hands 6-10: TT, AQ s, AJ s, AK, KQ s
- Group 3:** Hands 11-16: AT s, KJ s, AQ, 99, QJ s, KT s
- Group 4:** Hands 17-24: 88, QT s, A9s, AJ, JT s, KQ, A8s, AT
- Group 5:** Hands 25-42: K9s, A7s, KJ, A5s, Q9s, T9s, 77, J9s, A6s, QJ, A4s, KT, QT, A3s, K8s, JT, A2s, Q8s
- Group 6:** Hands 43-51: T8s, K7s, 98s, 66, J8s, A9, K6s, K5s, A8
- Group 7:** Hands 52-68: 87s, 97s, K4s, Q7s, T7s, K9, J7s, T9, 55, Q6s, Q9, K3s, J9, A7, Q5s, A5, K2s
- Group 8:** Hands 69-84: Q4s, A6, T6s, J6s, A4, J5s, K8, Q3, 44, T8, A3, J8, Q8, K7, A2, K6

# of hands	Frequency	NOTES
Hands 1-24	11.3%	Groups 1-4
Hands 1-42	20.0%	Groups 1-5, 1 in 5
Hands 1-51	24.0%	Groups 1-6, 1 in 4
Hands 1-68	32.9%	Groups 1-7, ~1 in 3
Hands 1-84	43.9%	Groups 1-8, almost ½

## Online No-Limit Texas Hold'em Poker for Beginners

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As you can see, you have probably been playing the wrong hands. It's okay. You didn't know better.

Generally speaking, our first experience with poker is usually 5-card where everyone antes and has to play their cards. If they fold, they are out their ante.

This mentality you just can't take to Hold'em. The only folks forced to pay are sitting in the blinds. That means, if you have a hand that isn't on that chart, don't even bother playing it. Fold it down. The higher up you go in the groupings, the better the hand.

The chart shows the frequency of these top 84 hands showing up as your two down cards. According to the groupings, 22, 33 and the low and middle suited connectors aren't even playable. And herein lies the problem with these groupings as they relate to No-Limit Hold'em.

Most all information on Hold'em, as said before, has been published with Limit Hold'em in mind. These rankings hold true, of course, but in No-Limit, I don't think I'd exactly throw out 22, and 33.

I will be referring back to the groupings and the chart for the rest of this book. Print out the chart and keep it in front of you if you can't remember how strong, or how weak, your hand actually is.

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Here are the starting hands charts, and groupings, in an easier to find format you can print out.

<b>1</b> AA	<b>22</b> KQ	<b>43</b> T8s	<b>64</b> J9
<b>2</b> KK	<b>23</b> A8s	<b>44</b> K7s	<b>65</b> A7
<b>3</b> QQ	<b>24</b> AT	<b>45</b> 98s	<b>66</b> Q5s
<b>4</b> JJ	<b>25</b> K9s	<b>46</b> 66	<b>67</b> A5
<b>5</b> AK s	<b>26</b> A7s	<b>47</b> J8s	<b>68</b> K2s
<b>6</b> TT	<b>27</b> KJ	<b>48</b> A9	<b>69</b> Q4s
<b>7</b> AQ s	<b>28</b> A5s	<b>49</b> K6s	<b>70</b> A6
<b>8</b> AJ s	<b>29</b> Q9s	<b>50</b> K5s	<b>71</b> T6s
<b>9</b> AK	<b>30</b> T9s	<b>51</b> A8	<b>72</b> J6s
<b>10</b> KQ s	<b>31</b> 77	<b>52</b> 87s	<b>73</b> A4
<b>11</b> AT s	<b>32</b> J9s	<b>53</b> 97s	<b>74</b> J5s
<b>12</b> KJ s	<b>33</b> A6s	<b>54</b> K4s	<b>75</b> K8
<b>13</b> AQ	<b>34</b> QJ	<b>55</b> Q7s	<b>76</b> Q3
<b>14</b> 99	<b>35</b> A4s	<b>56</b> T7s	<b>77</b> 44
<b>15</b> QJ s	<b>36</b> KT	<b>57</b> K9	<b>78</b> T8
<b>16</b> KT s	<b>37</b> QT	<b>58</b> J7s	<b>79</b> A3
<b>17</b> 88	<b>38</b> A3s	<b>59</b> T9	<b>80</b> J8
<b>18</b> QT s	<b>39</b> K8s	<b>60</b> 55	<b>81</b> Q8
<b>19</b> A9s	<b>40</b> JT	<b>61</b> Q6s	<b>82</b> K7
<b>20</b> AJ	<b>41</b> A2s	<b>62</b> Q9	<b>83</b> A2
<b>21</b> JT s	<b>42</b> Q8s	<b>63</b> K3s	<b>84</b> K6

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<u>Aces</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Kings</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Queens</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Jacks</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Group</u>
AA	1	1	KK	2	1	QQ	3	1	JJ	4	1
AKs	5	1	KQs	10	2	QJs	15	3	JTs	21	4
AK	9	2	KQ	22	4	QJ	34	5	JT	40	5
AQs	7	2	KJs	12	3	QTs	18	4	J9s	32	5
AQ	13	3	KJ	27	5	QT	37	5	J9	64	7
AJs	8	2	KTs	16	3	Q9s	29	5	J8s	47	6
AJ	20	4	KT	36	5	Q9	62	7	J8	80	8
ATs	11	3	K9s	25	5	Q8s	42	5	J7s	58	7
AT	24	4	K9	57	7	Q8	81	8	J7	x	x
A9s	19	4	K8s	39	5	Q7s	55	7	J6s	72	8
A9	48	6	K8	75	8	Q7	x	x	J6	x	x
A8s	23	4	K7s	44	6	Q6s	61	7	J5s	74	8
A8	51	6	K7	82	8	Q6	x	x	J5	x	x
A7s	26	5	K6s	49	6	Q5s	66	7	J4s	x	x
A7	65	7	K6	84	8	Q5	x	x			
A6s	38	5	K5s	50	6	Q4s	69	8			
A6	70	8	K5	x	x	Q4	x	x			
A5s	28	5	K4s	54	7	Q3s	76	8			
A5	51	6	K4	x	x	Q3	x	x			
A4s	35	5	K3s	63	7	Q2s	x	x			
A4	73	8	K3	x	x	Q2	x	x			
A3s	70	8	K2s	68	7						
A3	79	8	K2	x	x						
A2s	41	5									
A2	83	8									

<u>Tens</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>Nines</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Group</u>	<u>8's &amp; less</u>	<u>Rank</u>	<u>Group</u>
TT	6	2	99	14	3	88	17	4
T9s	30	5	98s	45	6	87s	52	7
T9	59	7	98	x	x	87	x	x
T8s	43	6	97s	53	7			
T8	78	8	97	x	x	77	31	5
T7s	56	7	96s	x	x	66	46	6
T7	x	x				55	60	7
T6s	71	8				44	77	8
T6	x	x				33	x	x
T5s	x	x				22	x	x

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### **Limping-in Bad Hands**

Playing your two down cards CORRECTLY is the most important part of Hold 'em, pre-flop. Just by looking at those 2 cards, you can get a pretty good idea of how good your chances are of winning that hand. No flop, no turn, no river.

All that the other cards do is change your chances, for better, or for worse. In this section, I am going to reveal the CORRECT way to play the top hands, and what hands you want to throw to the muck.

In the chart above, you see hands in "groups" that were originally set forth by S&M and restructured more recently for a college computer science thesis. These groups are important. It sure makes talking about the hands a lot easier. And so we begin.

Any dummy can tell you that AA is the best hand to play and 72os is the worst. But, what if 772 flops? How do you like your aces now? Granted, if another ace comes on the turn or the river, you beat old 72's full house. It could happen. The more important question you should ask yourself is, "Why did I let someone with 72 stay in the hand?"

In Hold'em, the players are allowed to raise pre-flop. Here is where the strategy starts. You see your two down cards, and know, generally, how strong they are. This is one determining factor in how you will play the hand.

The second is your POSITION at the table. It is a LOT easier to play from the button, or close to it in late position, because you will already know how everyone else has bet.

The third is the cost of the blinds. There are some definite guidelines for playing each hand, and I will discuss those here.

In an SNG game everyone starts with the same amount of chips. Generally, this is 800 or 1000. The blinds usually start at 10/15, and go up to 15/30 next after 10 hands or 15 minutes. These are the low blinds. When the blind is low, it encourages you to limp-in more.

I would say to limp-in with about everything, if you can, when the blind is at 15. You never know what you are going to catch, and if nobody ever raises behind you, you will spend a grand total of 150 chips to see 10 flops. Even if you never catch anything, you are still only down to 650 chips and can tighten it down from there. So the blind cost should be a major determination of how often you attempt to limp-in.

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You must have discipline though, if you are going to limp-in during the 15 blinds. It is much easier to limp-in from the button or late position as you know if anyone ahead of you raised or not. From early position, you are just hoping. You must have discipline.

Even 72os is a decent limp-in with the right flop. But, a hand that is decent for a 15 bet may not be a good bet at all at 30. Just like a good bet at 30, may not be a good bet at 50. I have heard so many folks lament throwing away 10 4 only to have 10 10 4 flop. They get miffed and say they should have stayed in. Being the ass that I am, I always retort, "It was only 15 chips. Were those 15 chips going to break you?"

The one pet peeve I have is when I'm on the button, and am trying to limp-in. It gets around to me, and I put in my 15, only to have the SB or the BB raise to 30. Ugh. At this point, it is a mistake to raise to 30. You need the discipline to fold it down. Of course, you will think, it is only another 15, so why not.

### **Pros and Cons**

There are pros and cons to doing this.

What if this happens 10 times? Now you are out 150 more chips and at 500 instead of 650, if nothing ever hit. Not really that big a deal, but you are playing for a "miracle" flop. Something along the lines of flush draw, 2 pair or 3 of a kind. The odds say, with your crappy hand, this is not going to happen.

Generally speaking, if you are trying to limp in cards that are at least connectors, or suited, then maybe you should put in the extra 15. If you are limping in something like K5 or A6, maybe also. But the 10 4 I mentioned previously, I wouldn't. You are hoping on just blind luck. If someone raised, even 15 chips, it means they have something they are positive about and are trying to either increase the pot, or weed people out.

Remember, as always, DON'T get sucked in. If you don't get **2 pair, a flush draw (with 2 suited cards or the ace) or trips**, FOLD! Nothing is worse than when you go in with said 10 4, get a 4 8 9 flop, and nobody is betting. They all bet 15, so you do, because you have low pair and a pseudo-straight draw.

Turn comes with a Q. Now you have low pair and a gutshot straight draw. Another 15, and you call. River comes with an ace. Someone bets big, and it's time to fold.

"Playing" this hand cost you 45 chips, and you were never really in contention. It is easy to do this, and do it often. This is the reason why the best players only play good starting hands. They don't want to keep throwing a "little" money at small percentages. They like to load up and throw a LOT of money at high percentages.

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In the previous example, if the J came on the river, odds are the worst you are going to do is split the pot. But, you could lose it also if the other guy came in with K T. That would give him 9 through K instead of your 8 through Q. This happens a lot, actually.

When people are in on rags, you will see folks bet up the “ignorant” side of a straight and be pissed when they lose. The ignorant side is the low side.

Lets say everyone is limped-in on a 15 bet. The flop comes 6 7 8. The guy in the big blind is excited all you “suckers” let him stay in the hand with his 45. He bets it up, and gets called. An ACE comes on the turn. Being that he still has the straight, he bets even bigger, figuring he’ll get extra money from the folks looking for the ace. He gets plenty of callers. River comes with a J. SWEET, he thinks. Bet BIG. He gets called down and loses to ANYONE with a 10.

When you have the ignorant side of a straight, it can’t get any better, it can only get worse. Either bet it big to try to force everyone else out, and hope for no callers, or just ride it in watching to see if a better straight becomes apparent.

Betting the ignorant side of an obvious straight is an easy way to lose.

## Playing Good Hands

### How Much to Bet?

In the chart above, S&M have arranged the hands into groups. Each grouping has different rules to follow. S&M put forth a general guideline that is still in use today, and makes great sense.

Generally speaking, for group 1 and 2 hands, you want to raise 4 bets pre-flop. In No-Limit, this means 4x the big blind. Group 3 hands you want to raise 1 bet, just to eliminate the riff-raff, or enrich the pot.

I would say, group 4 to 6, I would look at your position, and how much they are asking to see the flop.

Group 7&8 you ONLY want to limp-in, and mostly, ONLY from LATE position. I don't know about ONLY playing 7's and 8's from late position, but ANYWHERE you play them, you need to play them with DISCIPLINE.

Assuming you limped it in with only paying the big blind, you need to know to FOLD if you do not hit a **4-card flush draw, trips, or 2 pair**. DISCIPLINE. Do not chase ANYTHING but the flush. If everyone just checks it around, then yeah, stay in the hand, but definitely don't call a raise.

There are correct ways to play the top hands, and you NEED to know how to play them in order to get the value you deserve from them. They are rare, and hopefully, if you get them, you will get some sucker that lets you double or triple up with them.

You need to KNOW YOUR TABLE. If you are playing an SNG, and you get AA and raise a 15 blind to 75 and get zero callers, then the game is pretty darn tight. You will need to remember that for later. But, if you raise the 75 with AA, and get 5 callers, you obviously undershot and have a good chance at losing.

In a real money game, with \$.50 blinds, I've seen everyone fold to a \$2, but 6 people call to a \$1. Sometimes, with the better hands, you just end up eating the blinds. Which is just fine later in an SNG game when the blinds are up there. In a ring game where the blinds stay the same, you don't want to make only \$0.75 every time you get AA.

You need to know your table and see how much money to get callers, and how much to get folders. Hopefully, you won't be dealt any of these group 1's or 2's until a few hands in so you can get a feel of how tight, or loose, the table is. Generally, at a \$6 SNG, the table is pretty loose. For a 75-chip bet, you will usually get 2 or 3 callers, which is just fine.

**Online No-Limit Texas Hold'em Poker for Beginners**

**Playing Group 1 Hands**

Lets start off this section by showing you, and explaining the top hands chart the young college phenom came up with:

**Table 4 - Mean Rank Order of Hands**

Number of Players at River						
Rank		2	3	4	5	6
1	AA	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
2	KK	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
3	QQ	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
4	JJ	14.4	4.8	4.4	4.3	4.0
5	AKs	5.0	5.4	5.4	7.2	26.6
6	TT	26.4	11.0	8.0	6.0	5.8
7	AQs	9.2	8.6	8.6	11.8	33.0
8	AJs	9.2	8.6	8.6	11.8	33.0
9	AK	7.5	7.8	10.0	26.2	40.0
10	KQs	11.2	12.2	18.2	18.0	20.0

As you can see, this is the mean rank order of the top 10 hands in hold 'em. The numbers across the top tell you how many folks are in to see the river card. The numbers in the boxes are the hand rank fluctuations. This was determined with heavy betting being involved, and in LIMIT hold 'em, i.e. no fold'em hold 'em.

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Because you can only raise so much, one bet, in Limit, more people can stay in the pot. If you want someone out in No-Limit, you make it VERY expensive for him to stay in and see cards. This chart makes a lot of sense though, and is still quite useful for explaining how to play the top hands in no-limit hold 'em.

As you can see, the top 3, AA, KK and QQ hold their value regardless of how many folks see the river card. These are the best hands in the game. Then we get to JJ.

JJ is listed as the 4<sup>th</sup> best hand in the game, but in a 2-player match up, it is equivalent to the 14<sup>th</sup> best hand. The way it played out in the computer is that if a player ended up one-on-one with JJ, and bet aggressively, they lost a LOT more than with QQ or higher.

But, with 6 people in, it realizes its rank as the number 4 hand. For 6 people to be in to see the river, I imagine the community cards were all runners and everyone was shooting for a straight. JJ is a good hand in that scenario, as the jack can be used as the low end of the highest straight or the high end of the middle straight.

The next hand is the big slick, AK, suited. This hand holds its value against up to 2 other opponents, but after that it starts to slip. This hand is helped greatly if there is the flush draw in its suit on the board, as you own the nuts in that case. As you will read below, the big slick is a bear of a hand.

The sixth ranked hand, ten-ten, is valued about the same as JJ. It loses its value in head to head, but if 5 or 6 are in, odds are the cards higher than it are spread out among the bettors, and TT is a pretty good hand. I will reveal below the "correct" way to play pocket pairs. Most importantly, JJ through 22.

The seventh hand, AQ s, never realizes its rank. And, as you can see, with a lot of people in, it's a very bad hand. This hand's strength is primarily in its suited aspect. It's still an ace with a good kicker, but if there is a K on the board, you can guess you are behind in the hand.

With the regular slick, just AK, you can see that it is about twice as "bad" as the same cards suited. Up to a point. With 4 others in, AK suited only loses two spots. AK unsuited loses 16 spots all the way down to 26. That's not good. It's still a good hand, but only with a decent flop.

As you will notice, most of these hands get worse and worse the more people are in. The exceptions are TT and JJ. These hands get better with more people in. Do you want to play them against a crowd? Not really. Especially not if there are any higher cards on the board. I will explain how to play these top hands in depth in the following paragraphs.

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**AA:** By far the best hand in the game. It works against 1 person, or 6. But, you don't want to play it against 6 every time. Watching WSOP, you see a lot of the guys slow play aces. It looks great, when all of a sudden, they've baited the other guy in, and WHAP! All-in! They turn them over, and the look on the guy's face with A Ts is always priceless.

The guys on the WSOP can slow play aces, and I'll tell you why you can't.

At the bigger blinds, say day 4, day 5 of the WSOP, there mostly are only good players left. Generally, good players have the discipline of only playing good hands. When they get good hands, they bet them. Which is my first RULE.

### **RULE 1: BET YOUR HANDS!**

If you watch, the guy that slowplays the aces is either on the button or in the blinds. If he's in the blinds, it does him no good to come out firing, as most all will fold, and he'll only collect the other blind and the ante. He wants to double up with AA. So, in the blinds, he can watch all the initial betting. Hopefully, one, and ONLY one of the other guys will come out betting. Then he just calls and sees the flop. Check, check, check. He just lays in wait until the other guy decides to make a play.

The other place is on the button. You get to see everyone come in. If some guy in position 4 comes out firing, everyone else behind him will lie down, and the button calls. #4 fires again, call, call, and call. This is advisable, as the AA's are only going against one other opponent. Unfortunately, in low buy-in SNG's, you don't have this option. If you try, you will usually be against 4 or 5 people, which is not good if you don't get a good flop.

To play AA, you need to raise 3 or 4 times the big blind. With AA, it doesn't matter what your position is, though, if you are under the gun, you could try to just call the big blind, then if someone raises, you go over the top, or call. This is risky though, as you may accidentally let everyone see the flop. If that is the case, hope for an ace.

If the blinds are 15, put in 60, 75 or 100. If the blinds are 30, put in 100, 125 or 150. If it's at 50, put in 150 or 200. Again, know your table. If a 60 bet will get 4 callers, but a 100 bet will get 2, bet the 100. If a 75 bet will get zero, but a 60 will get 3, take the 60 with 3 callers. You want to collect all the chips, and weed out low hands.

If the flop doesn't give someone else a good hand, raise, raise, raise. If it looks like there could be a flush draw, RAISE EVEN MORE. You want to knock anyone trying to make a straight or flush draw against you, out. Or make it really expensive for them.

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How much to raise post flop? Generally,  $\frac{1}{2}$  the pot. So, if three players are in, and you raised to 125, there is now, say 375 in there. If you are trying to keep someone from chasing the flush, put in double what the pot has, or go all-in.

If you don't catch an ace on the flop, you jump your raise to 150-200. Hopefully, one or more will drop. Then there is, say, 700 in there, and the turn card doesn't pair the board, and it isn't an ace, you want to bet at least what you bet last time, if not some more. In this case 200-350. Or, if you are a bit worried, you can try to knock the other guy out by putting him all in. If you are the big stack.

But, if the board pairs, with say, K's, Q's, or 10's, you can pretty much assume someone has 3 of a kind. This is why you want to get it down to one or two people pre-flop. Odds are they are staying in with AK, AQ, AT, or more likely, KK, KQ, KT, KJ and most likely suited. That way, when the flop comes, 8 4 J, you know you can raise at will. If the board pairs, or even if there is a Q, a K or a J up there, you have to be a bit careful if someone has pockets.

If you raised correctly, and got one or two callers, and you catch an ace on the flop, it is going to be tough to beat you. Again, look at the cards. Make sure there isn't a straight draw, or a flush draw. If there is, you need to BET and BET BIGGER. You want to drive folks out that are trying to draw a hand that will beat 3 aces.

If there is neither of those, NOW it is time to slowplay.

You want to get as much out of this guy, these guys, as you can. When they see that ace up there, and you check it, or if they check to you and you check, you give the impression that you have K's or Kx and are now afraid of the ace.

**AGAIN, DO NOT CHECK IF THERE IS A FLUSH DRAW AGAINST YOU!**

Or even a mid-high straight. If your opponent is holding Kx and sees you check, he will see if he has 2-pair or not. What you are hoping for is a guy to actually have the 4<sup>th</sup> ace and something else, say AJ suited. With your check, he will assume, hopefully, that he is now the leader with Aces and a high kicker, and will try to milk you.

If you see the turn card, and there are 2 of the same suit out there, you may want to go over the top of any bet and make sure he folds shop, or make it excruciatingly expensive for him to try to complete his supposed flush. Don't get beat by the flush, or straight, without doing your best to knock him out.

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Also, if slowplaying because the ace came up on the flop, and the board pairs, you now have a full house. Let him draw to the flush or straight. There is little chance he is betting because he has 4 of a kind, especially if the board pairs with low cards. Only make token bets, or calls, and hope the flush comes up. If it does, make a small bet, and let him come over the top of you. Don't just let him check.

Too many times, I've gotten the ace on, say, the turn, with a low pair shown on the flop, gotten all excited and overplayed, driving everyone else out in an attempt to quell the draw toward the flush. The flush wouldn't have beaten the full house with 3 aces. The **only** thing that will, in that scenario, is 4 of a kind.

If you have aces, and bet them correctly, and the board pairs low, and you get a 3<sup>rd</sup> ace for your full house aces full of X, and still get beat because someone was paying, and holding low pockets, that is a bad beat. It is a bad beat even if it's Q's or K's, but at least, you know why they were holding them through the raises.

**KK:** A lot of beginners think that the KK is a terrible hand because they keep losing with it. The way to play this hand is EXACTLY as above with the AA. You play the KK from any position with a 3x or 4x raise pre-flop. The only thing you have to look out for is if an ace falls. If you raised correctly pre-flop, and you have one or two in with you, there is a pretty good chance of either or both having an ace. At this point, you have two options.

The first, and right thing to do is to check, and when they raise, fold it down. It's hard to muck 2 kings, but you pretty much have to. You are beaten unless a K comes on the turn or river. If they are slowplaying their pair of aces, take as many free cards as you can. If you can catch the 3<sup>rd</sup> king because some yahoo decided to be sneaky, they are beat. Most will raise, and if they do, I wouldn't chase them. There are only 2 cards in the deck that can help you at this point, so the odds are very much against you.

The second, and more aggressive, way to play is to keep betting like you have AA. If you bet KK exactly as you bet AA, and you had one of these hands previously at this table, they won't know exactly what you have.

The reason to keep betting, and betting big, is to make them question their kicker. It may end up costing you, but if they just followed you in with, say A9s, and the flush isn't a possibility, and you keep hammering away, you may make them crack and fold by making them think you are in with AA, AK, AQ, AJ, or AT.

This works quite well actually against folks that have the ace and the ten or lower. You most likely WON'T be able to make someone with AK, AQ or AJ fold it down. These folks are assuming they have high pair, high kicker, and no amount of money you throw at them will deter them.

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Another way to play it, if you are leading in chips, and the flop comes with an ace, is to instantly put in enough chips to force the other two all-in. This makes them assume you have AA or AK, which will be tough to beat with an ace on the flop. Faced with being eliminated, they may fold it down with a low kicker.

Without an ace in the mix, just keep pounding away. It is very rare for a guy to have KK and have an AA against him in the same hand. It happens, and it hurts when it does, but it doesn't happen very often.

**QQ:** With QQ, you also raise it as with KK or AA. Again, if the Ace or King is on the board, and you raised properly, you are already beat. Hope the guy/guys you went in with try to slowplay it. That way, when you check, they will let you see a card for free. Don't get caught up if you do make your trips though. With an A or a K already on the board, there is a good chance they have 3 of a kind also.

**AK:** The big slick. By far THE most overrated hand in the game, and a hand it is tough to win with. This hand TOTALLY relies on the flop. The "correct" way to play this is to OVERBET it. Unfortunately, when you do get a caller, they usually have a pair, and you are about dead. You can hope they have QQ or lower so you still have your 6 out cards. That is the correct way. The ONLY time I play it that way, is when the blinds get big, over 100, and there are only 4 or 5 left at the table.

The way I prefer to play it is to just limp it in, or maybe just a single bb raise. This will get rid of folks with 2 6 and other really crappy hands. If you don't get an A or a K, and someone bets it up, fold it down. In this case, you haven't put a lot into the pot, and it's just another case of the slick gone badly.

If you don't get a matching card, you only have ace-high. But, if you do get an A or a K, check it around, or a minimal raise, and see if anyone bets. If they do, you can go over the top. I would wait for someone to steal, or bluff at it.

Beware the flush draw or straight draw though. Especially the flush draw. If there is a flush draw, you should try to make it quite expensive for them to chase. If the flush draw doesn't happen, you know you won't be able to milk them after the river card, so you have to milk them earlier. If it does hit, don't invest much more than the minimal bet.

If someone is a maniac and puts it all in, you will need to know the player. If they get the "supposed flush" on the turn, and go all-in, most likely it is a bluff. Why would you try to keep people out with the flush, except to keep the board from pairing? You need to know the player.

Good luck with the big slick. It's a bear of a hand.

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**JJ:** This hand is a strong hand that many folks get beat with. It is a dangerous hand. The easy way to play it is to limp it in, or preferably, especially at the low blinds, give it one raise. If there is nothing but rags on the board, you are most likely in the lead and you can bet.

You may want to over bet at that point to, hopefully, drive out the folks with A, K, or Q before they get their pair. Or you can slowplay it and hope for a 3<sup>rd</sup> J, making you tough to beat.

With trips J's in this scenario, where you can limp it in, you will be very tough to beat. You don't see many folks slowplaying AA, KK or QQ. If you get the J on the flop, HOPE that there is a higher card with it. You will be able to bet, and since the K, Q, or A was matched, you will probably get some action.

The other way to play this hand is to TOTALLY over bet it. If you have a decent sized stack, throw all your chips in. Or bet 4 or 5 times the big blind. Do this especially in late position. Hopefully someone won't have AA, KK, or QQ, and someone with, say, AQ will call you. (If you are in late position, if someone had those better hands, hopefully they will bet them, and that should deter you from going all-in.)

Even if the folks with the higher pairs do call, it's a coin flip to see who will make their hand. They own the tie, unfortunately. Or you won't get a call and steal the blinds. I wouldn't suggest this when the blinds are 15 or 30, as you will most likely be only making the blinds as your profit. But, when the blinds are 100 or above, this strategy works pretty well. If they don't call, you get the blinds. If they do call, in a short-handed game, they usually only have Ax and are trying to double up. If the Ace doesn't fall, they are in big trouble. Personally, I prefer to slowplay them, until the blinds get to 50 or more. Then I over bet them.

**TT-22:** JJ can be included here also. All of these pairs don't really do well until you get trips, then it's go time. Or do they? The conventional way to play these pairs is to follow the crowd. If nobody is betting, maybe give it one raise of the BB. But, for the most part, limp it in and see the flop.

If someone raises to 75 or 125, meaning a good, high pair or high suited connectors, it is often still a good idea to call and see the flop. If you flop trips, bet it up. If you don't get trips on the flop, and nobody else really goes at it, you can wait for your card.

If you can limp in a pair, and there really isn't much action, and no overcards to your pair, you are most likely leading. The key is to get trips. Trips is a good hand, but beware of the flush draw. If you go in with, say, 99, and flop a 9, but there are 2 suited cards, bet it hard. You want to make it expensive for the other players to try to get the flush.

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They will still most likely chase it, and if the 3<sup>rd</sup> suited card hits, and the board doesn't pair, it's time to check it around. Limp pairs in, and bet it hard when you get trips. This is the conventional way. The more "new-school" way is a bit extreme. I will explain it below.

### **Playing Low Pairs (and the slick) All-in**

Have you ever seen where everyone is just posting the big blind, with few raisers, and all of a sudden, someone pushes their stack of 700 all-in? Then everyone folds in turn. You make some comment to yourself like, "What an ass. I hope someone calls him next time and puts him out."

I know I used to think that too. What was actually happening, most likely, is that he had a pair. Maybe a "high pair". In this case, I mean JJ, TT, or 99, or maybe AK. I would say MOST of the time that is the case. Rare is the case that someone would "waste" AA, KK, or QQ with just the possibility of raking the blinds.

AA, KK and QQ, as you can see in the chart, hold their value regardless of how many people are in at the river. Think about it. If you have AA, and nothing but rags come up, as long as the board doesn't pair low, you have the winning hand. Same with KK, or QQ.

If the community cards come in high, you have most all hands beat. The exceptions, of course, are when you have KK, or QQ and an ace is on the board. You know you are behind. But, if you catch your K or Q, you will most likely win the hand.

High pairs are good hands, and as explained above, if bet correctly pre-flop, should only be up against other decent hands. It is RARE when you bet up 125 on KK, and someone calls with AA. More often, folks call you with Ax or Kx suited looking more for the flush.

Although there was one time that I was short-stacked, and went all-in with QQ pre-flop. Three others went all-in also pre-flop. As we revealed, one had AA, the next had KK, and lastly the other guy had AK. I was amazed, but happy I still had my 2 outs in the deck, whereas, AA knew he wouldn't get any better. Nobody caught anything, as you'd expect, and I was out. So it does happen. It's just not very likely.

With pairs JJ on down, throwing it all-in is a pretty good way to make at least the blinds, and maybe double-up.

Let me explain.

Say you have 55, pocket 5's. (P5's) It gets to you, and you go all-in. Most of the time, everyone will fold. You then rake the blinds and whoever called the blinds. But, if someone calls, you have an instant showdown.

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In this case, let's say you raised in early position and the guy behind you called your all-in with AA. You think you are dead. He thinks you are dead. This is NOT the case at all. At this point, all he has is the "tie" if nobody catches anything. You have EXACTLY the same odds of making trips as he has of catching a 3<sup>rd</sup> ace. That's a coin flip.

So, you think, since there are still 5 cards to be revealed, you only have 2 cards in 48 to beat the AA. That's about a 4% chance, impossible. Not so. You still have 5 draws at that 4% chance with every card that ISN'T a 5 making your percentages better. I have lost PLENTY of times with my opponent only having that 4 or 5% chance with ONLY the river card left. So it isn't impossible, it's a coin flip.

You also have to take the board into consideration and your suits. If either, or both, of your 5's are different suits than his aces, you can win with a flush if 4 of your suited cards come up. Also, pre-flop, you have a MUCH better chance at a straight than AA.

With 5's, you are the high card in A-5, the low card in a 5-9, and the middle card on all straights in between. You have 5 straight possibilities. With AA, he only has two straight possibilities, and if you have 55, his low straight has to be perfect. The only cards on the table could be 2 3 4 5 and one other, non-pairing card.

Or the board could create a straight, or a flush, and you'd split. Say, 7-J, or 8-Q. Or any straight, really, as long as you or he weren't the ONLY owner of the straight. So, you aren't dead by any means, pre-flop.

But, if you play this correctly, you WON'T be up against those top hands. Now I will explain the correct way to play with this strategy.

First off, I wouldn't do this with, say, 44, 33, or 22. First because of the limited straight possibilities, but mostly because EVERYTHING that anyone calls with will be higher than your cards. This doubles his chances of catching his card.

JJ, TT, 99 are GREAT hands to do this with. The correct way to do this is in late position, preferably on the button. That way, you get to see if anyone gives the BB a good raise, or if someone else goes all in. That way, you can decide to play the conventional way or not.

A great time to do it is in late position with 4 or 5 callers to the big blind, or small raises. Then you just go all-in, they fold it up, and you rake it without showing what you had. Now they don't know if you just burned an AA hand, or bluffed with 72os.

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The SECOND time you do it, you will most likely get a caller; just to see what hand you think is worth such a raise. The second or third time is a REALLY good time to do it with AA, or KK, or QQ. You will most likely beat whatever they call you with, and the others at the table will likely assume that's how you always play those pairs, and try to avoid you.

That works out GREAT for the end game with huge blinds.

What you are looking for, if played correctly, is someone with a lower pair than you that knows this little trick. He's taking his coin flip shot to double up, and more power to him. Just hope he doesn't get lucky.

More often your callers will be folks trying to limp in AK/AK suited, AQ/AQ suited, and AJ/AJ suited that didn't want to bet, but have decent hands. Especially if their suit comes up. In a loose game, or if someone is short-stacked, you will see callers with Ax suited.

If you do this with JJ, TT or 99, hopefully their off card is lower than your pair. To beat you, he is basically down to 3 cards. This is why I advise against doing this with really low pairs, like 44, 33, and 22.

If, say, you were all in with 44, and a short-stack calls with A5 suited, he's still going to need to get some luck, but his odds are doubled. He'll have 6 cards against your 2. Plus, he'll have the flush draw, and the straight draw. I don't really like your chances in that case.

If you were all-in with, say, 7's, he has to pair his top card which is 3 cards to your 2, so about the same odds. In that case, I'd be more worried about the flush. More often than not, when you do this, and are called, it will be against someone with an ace, and suited or someone with a pair.

Fortunately, most of the time you do this, it won't be called at all, and you can rake in the pot. That's why I usually won't do it until the blinds at an SNG are up to 50 and above. That way, if all you collect are the blinds, you are still making 75, and people think you are an idiot and can't play.

Where this works BEST is at the higher blinds, say 100 or 200, and you are short-stacked, but not low enough to get 5 callers. Say, the blinds are 100 and you only have 400. Go all in. In this case, regardless of position. Hopefully in late position where one or 2 other guys only called the BB. That way, if everyone folds, you have the 2 calls, the SB and the BB. That's 350. You basically doubled up without having to show a card. If only all poker were that easy.

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Usually, when you are the short-stack, folks want you out. Some people take pride in how many folks they eliminated. I don't get that. It must be an ego thing. I take pride in playing well and winning money. Everyone could knock each other out as long as I'm left standing for all I care.

You will get these "Samaritans" that want to do the table a favor and rid the rest of your presence. Usually the large stack playing loose. You go all in with your 400 chips, which are a deterrent to someone holding on with 1200 or so, but if a guy has 3000, it is only an annoyance, and he calls. This is what you want. More often than not, these "Samaritans" will try to put you out with just about anything.

I saw a guy today try to do it with Q 5 os. The guy short stacked had 9's and it was no contest. These guys get a bit loose just trying to rid the table of the short stack, but what they actually do is double them up. If you are the big stack, don't be that guy. Let them earn their way back in the hard way. Or call if you have something decent. Heck, even ANY flush draw, with an A or K, is okay to call against a pair pre-flop.

I guess that that is enough about the game of pre-flop poker. You now know your hands, the ranking of the hands, and you have a good idea of your chances of winning with those hands. If you only play good hands, you have a much better chance of winning.

Now I will move on to your odds of winning with your hand post-flop.

## Post-Flop Hand Odds

### Calculating Outs

You've started with a good hand. You think you have a pretty good chance of winning with it, depending on the flop. And there it is. The flop changes the dynamic of the game. Every hand is a good, or great, hand if they get the right flop. But, you don't always flop the nuts. You rarely do. So you have to make do with what you now have.

You possibly have two more cards coming to help you, or hurt you, and you need to know the odds of that help, or hurt, happening. That is what hand odds is all about.

Hand odds are your percentage chance of getting the card you think will win the hand for you. If at all possible, hope to draw to the nuts. But that's not always possible. If you have pocket 9's and the flop comes Q 4 2, you most likely won't be drawing to the nuts.

But, since there wasn't a raise pre-flop, you are pretty sure trips 9's will win it. If another Q shows up, not only won't you be drawing to the nuts, you may be drawing dead. Then again, the guy with the Q most likely doesn't have QQ as he didn't raise pre-flop. So, if the other Q does show, then a 9 on the river, you've made your boat, which most likely will be good enough.

So it doesn't have to be the nuts you are drawing to, just good enough to win. You need to be able to analyze your chances of succeeding with your draw, and that's what this section is all about.

I'm going to post the "standard" hand odds chart. Don't put all your faith into these percentages. I will explain a bit about them below. I will also show you how to calculate your outs and compute your own odds.

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**Outs and Odds Chart**

**Outs and Odds**

Number of Outs	After Flop	After Turn
	Two Cards to Come	One Card to Come
	PERCENTAGE	PERCENTAGE
1	4.3	2.2
2	8.4	4.3
3	12.5	6.5
4	16.5	8.7
5	20.3	10.9
6	24.1	13
7	27.8	15.2
8	31.5	17.4
9	35	19.6
10	38.4	21.7
11	41.7	24
12	45	26.1
13	48.1	28.3
14	51.2	30.4
15	54.1	32.6
16	57	34.3
17	59.8	37
18	62.4	39.1
19	65	41.3
20	67.5	43.5

Or this, taken from <http://www.poker-beginner.com/probability.htm>

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### Odds Scenarios Chart

The odds of improving your hand on **the flop** when you hold certain pocket cards

You hold	Flop gives you	Odds	%
Pocket pair	Three of a kind	10.1-1	9,0%
Pocket pair	Four of a kind	407-1	0,24%
Pocket pair	Full house	136-1	0,73%
Any two unpaired cards	Two pairs	48.5-1	2,0%
Any two unpaired cards	A pair	2.1-1	32,4%
Two suited cards	Flush	118-1	0,84%
Two suited cards	Four cards to a flush	8.1-1	10,9%
Any two unsuited cards	Four cards to a flush	88-1	1,12%
Two connected offsuit cards (4,5 to T,J)	Straight	76-1	1,31%

The odds of improving your hand on **the turn** when you hold certain hand

You have	Turn gives you	Odds	%
Four cards to a flush	Flush	4.2-1	19,1%
Open ended four card straight	Straight	4.9-1	17,0%
Gutshot straight draw	Straight	10.8-1	8,5%
Three of a kind	Four of a kind	46-1	2,1%
Two pair	Full house	10.8-1	8,5%
A pair	Three of a kind	22.5-1	4,3%
Nothing	A pair with a pocket card	6.8-1	12,8%

The odds of improving your hand on **the river** when you hold certain hand:

You have	River gives you	Odds	%
Four cards to a flush	Flush	4.1-1	19,6%
Open ended four card straight	Straight	4.8-1	17,4%
Gutshot straight draw	Straight	10.5-1	8,7%
Three of a kind	Four of a kind	45-1	2,2%
Two pair	Full house	10.5-1	8,7%
A pair	Three of a kind	22-1	4,3%
Nothing	A pair with a pocket card	6.7-1	13,0%

The odds of improving your hand from **the flop to the river**:

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You have	Turn or river gives you	Odds	%
Four cards to a flush	Flush	1.9-1	35,0%
Three cards to a flush	Flush	23-1	4,2%
Open ended four card straight	Straight	2.2-1	32,0%
Gutshot straight draw	Straight	5.1-1	17,0%
Three of a kind	Four of a kind	22.3-1	4,3%
Two pair	Full house	5.1-1	17,0%
A pair	Four of a kind	1080-1	0,09%
A pair	Three of a kind	10.9-1	8,4%

### Flop probability:

The table flops	Odds	%
Three of a kind	424-1	0,24%
A pair	5-1	17,0%
Three suited cards	18-1	5,2%
Two suited cards	0.8-1	55,0%
No suited cards	1.5-1	40,0%
Three cards to a straight	28-1	3,5%
Two cards to a straight	1.5-1	40,0%
No straight cards	0.8-1	56,0%

Above are a couple of charts that have your chances of drawing your card computed for you. These are based on your number of outs. OUTS are how many different cards are theoretically left in the deck to improve your hand i.e. make your straight, make your flush, get trips.

If you have the pair of 9's in the previous example, you have two outs, the other two nines. This is theoretical. If you are playing two or three-handed, there is a pretty good chance no one has taken one of your outs.

But, with ten players in, there is a pretty good chance of someone having one of your nines. That is why these percentages are only theoretical. You can only make the assumptions of the percentages based on the cards you've actually seen.

With your two outs, and the turn and the river to come, the chart says you have an 8.4% chance of getting the other nine. With only the river left, you are down to a 4.3% chance.

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Will it happen at 4.3%? I get beat by folks needing this supposed 4.3% all the time. Supposedly, if I am in the lead and only one of these two cards will give him the win, and there is only the river card to come, I should have a 95.7% chance of winning.

Do I win the showdown 96% of the time? Not even close. That would mean I would only suffer 4 bad beats in every 100 showdowns at that percentage. With my luck, and my experience, I would say he would draw the nine 25-35% of the time. Not 4%.

Pessimistic? Maybe a little, but the percentages are totally based on cards you've seen. They are not based on the actual cards left. There is the problem.

In order to calculate your outs, you have to base it off of the cards you've actually seen. Example: You have JT. Flop comes 9 Q 4. You have an open-ended straight draw. You have eight outs to complete your hand. Will it be the best hand? Possibly not.

If the K comes on the turn, you have your straight. Unfortunately, when a J or a 10 comes on the river, anyone holding A 10 or A J now has a better straight than you. You always want the straight to fill in on the low end in order to bet it. But I digress.

You have eight outs, the four K's and the four 8's. There are "47" cards left. You have two and can actually see 3 more. So, 52 cards minus 5 cards are 47. In a ten-handed game, it is more than likely that someone, or two, or four, had your cards. This would lower your percentage.

As it is, you have a theoretical 31.5% chance of completing your hand with the next 2 cards. But, you say, isn't 8 divided by 47 17%? Yes it is. And that is why the percentages given "with 2 cards left" are a bit of a farce.

There is some pretty smooth math involved in generating this 31.5% chance, and none of it has to do with poker. In reality, you have a 17% draw on the turn card (8/47), and then when you don't make it, you have a better 17.4% (8/46) chance of making the straight. These are all theoretical percentages I'll remind you.

There are nine other guys at the table, each with two cards. If NONE of these guys took ANY of your out cards, your percentages go up to (8/29) 27.6% on the turn and (8/28) 28.6% on the river.

As you can see, the actual percentages vary quite a bit. The only way to get the true percentage is to play all the cards face up. Unfortunately, the cards are played face down, thus you never know your true percentage. That is, unless you are in a two-handed situation and one of you two are all-in.

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### Computing Outs Percentages the Easy Way!

As you may expect, there is a lot of math involved to come up with the percentages above. Do you need to know it, or memorize the charts? No.

The easy way to figure your percentage chance of hitting your card is to come up with your number of outs. If the situation is post-flop, take that number times 4. (4x outs)

If the situation is post-turn, take the number times 2, plus 2. ((2x outs)+2) These percentages will be pretty close. What you are really trying to decide is your theoretical chance of drawing the card. The actual percentage is not all that relevant.

In the example with the 9's above, you know you need one of two cards that may be left in the deck. That is two outs. As I said before, I don't put much faith in the percentages with two cards left. I just treat each draw as it's own separate entity. In this case, two outs times two plus two. A six percent chance of getting the other 9 on the turn, and if not then, on the river.

All you really need to know is that six percent is not all that good. A little better than one in twenty. Again, this is more of a guideline and not a predictor of what will actually happen.

Recently I was in a game, post-flop, where one of my opponents went all-in. I didn't have a pair yet, but when I counted my outs, I came up with 19 of them. I figured if I hit ANY of the 19 outs, I'd win the hand. If you look at the chart, that means that I have a 65% chance of getting the card I need in the next two cards. Since I don't believe that, and just use the times two, plus two, I figured I'd have a 40% chance on each draw.

That is a great percentage, actually, if you are behind in a hand. So I call his all-in. He had a pocket pair 66. I didn't hit ANY of my supposed 19 outs and I was out of the game. After knowing what he had, I went back and counted how many "actual" outs I had. It ended up being something like 30 or so. 30 cards, in two draws to beat his weak pair of 66 and I couldn't do it.

I am not ONLY one of the unluckiest card players in the world; I am also one of the most bitter.

"If it weren't for luck, I guess I'd win every hand." Was once quoted by Phil Hellmuth in one of his tirades. That is exactly how I feel.

It is also said that "Good poker players don't play hoping to get lucky. They hope to not get unlucky." This statement is true also.

## Playing in Position

As I have mentioned before, in the definitions, Playing in Position is THE most important skill in Texas Hold'em Poker. You absolutely want to get your best hands when you are on the button, as you can dictate the action. More importantly, when you are on the button, or in late position, you can play lesser hands without it potentially costing you as much.

On the button is the best position in poker. You are "in Position" if you are on the button. What this really means is, nobody is betting behind you.

When you are in the blinds, you are in early position, or more accurately, out of position. The next couple spots after the button are still in early to mid position and are weak spots.

The best way to think about it is, how many people are behind you that may potentially raise your call? That is the question. When you are in the small blind, EVERYONE is behind you. When you are on the button, only the blinds are behind you, pre-flop. After that, you are last to bet. You get to see what everyone else does before you get to decide what to do.

From here on out, I am going to label the spots 1-10 in a ten person SNG assuming all 10 players are still in. 1 is the small blind, 10 is on the button. Play flows around the table, clockwise, from 1 to 10.

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### **Tight in front, loose in back**

Tight in front, loose in back is an old adage about playing poker. It is THE way to play Hold'em. I touched on it briefly in the starting hands section. I will reiterate here.

Playing "tight" is only playing good hands. In our groupings, we are talking group four or higher. Playing loose is playing just about anything. In our groupings, group five and down. Anything out of the groupings is REALLY loose.

The ONLY time to play cards that loose is in the end game, with four or five players left, or if you are on the button and can limp in.

Since you can see how everyone has bet ahead of you, playing on the button is the best spot in poker. If someone ahead of you raises more than you are comfortable putting in, you can fold without it costing you anything. The blinds only have this advantage pre-flop, but it costs them a bet, and a half-bet, apiece.

From the button, with low blinds, I would say to play just about anything. If no one has raised, with only players calling the BB, what will it hurt to limp-in by only paying, say, 3-6% of your stack? If you catch a miracle flop, it will pay for itself, possibly, 100-fold.

Again, you need discipline when you limp-in. You are looking for **trips, 4-card flush draw, or two-pair**. If the betting doesn't get heavy, then stay in the hand. Otherwise, get out.

In early position, say positions one through five, you only want to play good hands. Top hands. You can try to limp it in from here, with lower blinds and playing at a pretty passive table. If someone raises behind you, though, you need the discipline to fold it down. You don't have a good hand, and are in bad position. That's two strikes against your chances this hand already.

If you know you have maniacs, or even good strong betting players behind you, don't even waste the money trying to limp-in a bad hand looking for a miracle flop from these positions. At the 30 blind and above, it's just a terrible idea. There will be better hands. Or, at least, the same hands with better position.

On the button, and a couple spots to his right, is late position. When you are in spots eight, nine, and the button, you can loosen up a bit and play worse hands. In the later positions, say seven through button, make sure to keep your eye open for folks folding behind you.

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Personally, without a raise on the table, I think it's crazy to fold the button position, but that's just me. If you are in position seven, and eight through ten fold, you are now on the button. I LOVE when this happens. Not only did three people volunteer not to play, but they also donated the best spot on the table to you.

There are a few advantages to playing the button, besides the obvious advantage of betting last. I will go into that next.

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### **Playing on the Button**

Playing the button, or position ten, is the best spot in the game. You will be on the button once every time around the table, but as mentioned above, when others fold they may donate the button to you. There are a few things you can do just because you are in late position.

First, you can steal the blinds. If everyone has folded, and all that is left in is you and the blinds, you can make an obnoxious raise over the top, hoping they will fold. A "button-raise". I would not recommend doing this unless you have, at least, a top 84 hand, and the blinds are 50 or more. Once the blinds get to 50, you make 75 chips when they fold.

However, if someone in the blinds is short-stacked, expect a re-raise to their all-in. It's a LOT easier to double-up against one opponent regardless of what they have. Players in the blinds that are short-stacked are waiting for just such an opportunity, as pre-flop is the only time they bet last.

You can do this when the blinds are 30 or 15, but you really aren't making much. Later in the game, with higher blinds, 100+, even with a raise to 200, expect the SB to fold, and then it's you against the BB, if he doesn't fold. This match up is all explained in the End Game section below.

You can also steal the table, especially at the lower blinds early in the game. If you have a somewhat decent hand, and six people have put in their 30 chip blind, from the button, you can go all-in. Or raise an obscene amount like 500. All-in usually works better. You don't want to play the hand, but you do want to collect 180 chips and not show your cards.

In this situation, you hope nobody was slowplaying a top 4 hand. Just by everyone limping it in, it usually means nobody had anything. More often than not, you will collect and move on to the next hand.

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### Two for the Price of One

Secondly, there is a trick you can do on the button that will get you two cards for the price of one, most often. Let's say it's a 15 blind, and there are eight people in. Everyone limped in without anyone raising. Flop comes. Everyone checks it around to you.

Now, a lot of times, the button just checks. But the best thing to do in this situation is to throw out a "feeler" bet. Throw out one bet. In this case 15 chips. This is also called betting for information. What it often does though, is gives you both the turn and the river for the price of one bet.

So it's checked around to you, and you put out a 15 bet. As it goes around, 3 people fold, the other 4 call. That eliminated 3 people from catching something later on. You will always see this. The best part happens next.

The turn card comes, and since it's human nature not to want to get re-raised, everyone "checks to the bettor". If you want to at this point, you can bet, but beware of slow-playing players. When everyone checks around, I just check, and voila, everyone knows his or her hand.

This trick works just excellently when you are trying to make a straight or a flush. The feeler BB bet is usually low enough for someone slow-playing to just call, and not re-raise.

In the previous example at the 15 blinds, you limped in your small suited connector for 15. You got two more of your suit on the flop. Everyone checks, you raise 15 chips. Most everyone calls. Turn comes and it's no help. Everyone checks to the bettor. You check. River comes for basically free.

Now you know whether or not you made your flush and can bet accordingly.

You paid 30 chips to see all 7 cards. You know exactly what you have, and you know what the nut hand is. At the higher blinds, say 50 or 100+, it is not uncommon just to see everyone fold to your feeler bet.

The feeler bet is also called betting for information. Say the flop comes AAQ. You know somebody has to have something, yet everyone checks. You throw in a bet that is double the blind, in this case, let's say 60. With that flop, almost everyone without an ace or Q will fold. Most likely someone will at least call, or raise over the top. Now you know at least half of their hand. You can compare it to yours and see if you want to go on.

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With a killer flop like that, and everyone checking, if nobody had anything they will fold. Oftentimes you will steal the pot just for a semi-aggressive feeler bet from the button.

Play the button for all it is worth. After all, you don't get that many hands with the button.

## The “Pot-Committed” Fallacy

Being “pot-committed” is defined as putting a decent amount of your chips into the pot, realizing you won't have a winning hand, and staying in the hand until it's conclusion. Often, especially in limit Hold'em, players will set traps to get their opponent “pot-committed” and take all their money with a superior hand.

I will state this now: There is no such thing as pot-committed. Pot-committed is a fallacy. It is an excuse. Many players use it as an excuse to justify their losing. You should not use this excuse.

Most often, a player is said to be pot-committed when he has unknowingly put too many chips into a pot with a losing hand. Then, when he realizes he has the losing hand, he pays to play the hand to completion just to make sure his opponent was not bluffing.

Rarely is his opponent bluffing, and now the player is eliminated, or severely short-stacked.

Pot-committed is an excuse the opponent is hoping the player uses to justify GIVING away all his chips. Good players set traps keeping the term pot-committed in mind.

Every player has his “loss threshold”. This is the point where a player decides he's in too deep to turn back. For some it's  $\frac{1}{2}$  their stack. Others, it's  $\frac{3}{4}$ . Others, it totally depends on the condition and how good the actual hand they have is, even if it's a loser.

Many players use the term pot-committed to justify their losing with the big slick. AK is only a good hand when an ace or king comes up on the board. Many a player has played the slick to the river, and beyond, in the hopes that ace-high, king-kicker is good enough to win. With 5 cards on the board that aren't aces or kings, that doesn't happen very often.

Somebody is going to pair something.

I've even seen folks with the slick throw the rest of their stack in, after the river card, hoping to bluff the other folks. The person with high pair is most often happy to oblige, and the slick is out.

You have to know your loss threshold, and try to ignore it. You are never out of a game until all your chips are gone. You can always, theoretically, come back and win if you have chips. The lower your stack though, the better the hands you will need to receive, and quickly.

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The reason pot-committed is a fallacy is that you can ALWAYS click the FOLD button. You can fold at any time, as long as you have chips left. Some people think it's not worth playing if they've lost almost all their chips, and toss the rest in. Even when they know they are beat.

Don't do this.

Even having some chips is better than having none. I have seen plenty of people come back from a devastating hit to finish in the money. My personal best is taking a bad beat with the other guy all-in, only having 65 chips left, and winning the game.

65 chips.

Granted, it was early, so I could take a look at a few hands because the blinds weren't going to force me out, but I still needed some good hands, and some luck. Most often when a guy gets that low, you see him all-in the next hand, with 5 callers, and he has 8 3os. Out.

I would say that the toughest thing to do in poker is to lay down a hand that you've spent a lot of chips on, even though you know it's a loser. Once you know you've lost a hand, or are going to lose, lay down the hand. At least, don't throw any more serious money at it.

Let's say you make your trips on the flop and don't want to see any more cards, as there is a flush draw with the flop. You want to make it expensive to chase it, so of your 800 chips, you throw in 450. The guy calls.

The turn doesn't help you, but it doesn't complete his flush if that is what he's going for. He checks. You throw up another 250, lowering your stack to 100 chips. He calls. River comes and it doesn't give you the boat but it does complete his flush.

He bets 100 to put you all-in. It is at this point you start to believe he may be bluffing. Maybe he only has 2 pair. Maybe he has trips, but they are lower as you have trips with the high card on the board. Maybe he was hoping to make his own boat, and missed, and is now trying to steal it by representing the flush. If he doesn't have the flush, you are certain you have the nuts. He hasn't lead with a bet, and now he's bluffing knowing you won't call because if you are wrong, you are done. You think, "I'll show his bluffing ass."

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You call. It's flipped. He has the flush. You are out.

At this point you say to yourself, "I had to call, I was pot-committed."

Or.

"Pot odds. It was 100 to win 1600, 16-1 with the nuts barring the flush."

Both of these statements are you deluding yourself. You could have just as easily clicked fold as you clicked call. Your opponent bet EXACTLY as he was chasing a flush, then when he made it, he raised to see if he could get the rest of your chips. There was nothing sinister. No cloak and dagger.

You say to yourself, "How could he pay that much to chase a flush? Doesn't he know that he only has roughly a 35% chance to get it? Boy is he stupid." Unfortunately, there are MANY folks who will chase down that flush. Especially if the pot keeps getting more lucrative. Especially at PartyPoker.com. "Home of the flush" they should call the place.

Most people will chase the flush, no matter how much you pay, if they know you are not chasing it also. By you raising 450 to take the pot, you were saying, essentially, "I want the pot, do not chase straights or flushes." At more expensive buy-ins, raising the pot 200% may work as a deterrent. It does not work very often at the \$6 and \$11 dollar SNG's.

These players will chase almost every flush. And, from my observations, they will be rewarded somewhere around 75% of the time. It is uncanny how many flushes you will see at PartyPoker.com. You will see as many hands won with a flush in 20 minutes at PartyPoker as you would in 2 hours at a casino. Maybe more. But that is a different subject altogether.

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### Lay Down a Loser

Obviously, you should have folded. You should have known you should have folded, and folded. Now, knowing what you know, and realizing the odds of someone chasing a flush every hand is pretty good, here is how you could have played in the above scenario.

If you still chose to raise 450, and he called, that should be the end of your deterring. You have dropped your stack from 800 to 350. Turn no help. He checks. You can give a token raise if you'd like, say 50 or so, or just check it. He's going to chase it to the end, and you have put a ton of chips in the pot already, why make it worse?

Granted, if he misses the flush, you will wish you had laid into him a bit more, but you can't know that until after the river card is down. If he makes the theoretical flush, and checks, just check it. If he doesn't have it, you win. If he was baiting you, he can have all the chips you already put in.

The only way I'd pay to see what he has in this case is if he makes it affordable. Say 50 or so. Most likely, as before, he'll put in enough chips to make you go all-in, hoping he's bluffing. He's hoping your curiosity, and the fact that over ½ your chips are in the pot, you will see it through and give him all your chips.

It takes control to lay down the trips. With having 300-350 chips left, you can still play. You can still easily make a comeback and win. Lay it down.

If I get trips on the flop, and the flush draw is there, I will raise as a deterrent. Only I won't raise a lot. Maybe 75, 100 or 125. Then, if he doesn't get it on the turn, I double the previous to 150, 200 or 250.

Then if he theoretically makes the flush on the river, I just check. I am in less than ½ my stack and I tried to deter him. Sometimes, if I get a caller after the initial raise, I'll check on the turn and save the chips. Generally speaking, chasers will pay as little as they can to see the next card. You tried to raise them out initially; it didn't work, so check it in.

It works both ways though. Say you are the chaser and your opponent makes the big raise, 450, on the flop, and the 250 on the turn. You call, river comes, and your flush isn't realized. Fold it up.

A lot of times, I will see folks with the busted flush raise the other guy, trying to bluff that they weren't chasing the flush the whole time.

This is silly.

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As we know, the opponent has the nut trips and is happy to call, or re-raise whatever you are willing to throw out there. With the busted flush, check it down. You are “pot-committed”, you think. No. You spent a lot of money to see the river card; you didn't make your hand, fold it down and see other hands.

You have to know to fold down a losing hand. More often than not, you know you have a loser. You chased a few big bets with your pair of 10's, and a third 10 never fell. There is a K and a Q on the board. Do you honestly think you have a chance?

People were raising, or calling your raises. Now, after the river card, they are raising again. Fold it down. Sure, they may be bluffing. They may be representing the flop.

### **YOU ONLY KNOW, FOR SURE, WHAT YOU HAVE!**

You know you have a pair of 10's, and it's just not good enough. There will be other hands. Fold down a losing hand.

If you don't call, and you do the right thing and fold it down, you can now try to rebuild. If you call, and lose the hand, you are done. Nobody wants to be short-stacked, but you will be there many times during your poker career.

The only exception to folding down a losing hand is when the blinds will eat you up. Say, if your opponent is trying to put you all-in, and all you have left is 100 chips or so anyway, and the blinds are 100, or 200 or 300 etc, you may just want to call and make sure he isn't bluffing. Just for your own sanity.

You know he isn't, and you know you have a loser, but the blinds are going to kill you. You will be relying on luck to get back ahead, and luck is something you don't want to rely on playing poker. Perhaps you should call him down and see if it all was a ruse.

This is the only exception.

If all you have left is 100, and the blinds are 50 or less, or more importantly, there are a bunch of people left in, you will get a lot of looks at hands for your 100 chips. You can pick your time to play, and try to double up.

A chip, a chair, and a prayer.

## Playing the Blinds

In position 1 (SB), and position 2 (BB), you already have your money in on the hand. The ONLY advantage you get in the blinds is that pre-flop, you get to bet last. After that, it's a terrible place to be.

Generally speaking, you DON'T want to play from this position. But, it is a no-limit game we are talking about here, so anything can happen. When you are in the blinds, you DO get to see what everyone else does first. Sometimes, you actually get a decent hand.

If everyone just calls the big blind, you are pretty golden. This is actually pretty common in lower buy-in games. Most folks are afraid to bet their hands, and try to slow play too much. You know a decent player by if he bets his hand or not.

If it gets called around to you, and you are in position 1, you have a decision to make. First, you are already in for ½ a bet. From the small blind, it is a losing proposition, over time, to always call to the big blind. But, with a decent hand, why not?

Skalanski and Muldem (S&M) write that anything played from group 7 or lower is not advisable, and not to overplay it. If you have one of the top 84 hands, in the small blinds, you are quite lucky. Since no one raised, and you are in for ½ already, it may be a good idea to put in the other half.

If the blinds are low enough, say 10/15 or 15/30, I almost always put in the other ½ if that is all it will cost me. Regardless of what I have. You could get lucky. If the bb is 30, and you are already in for 15, and have roughly 800 chips, like at the start of a game, you are really only throwing in 2% of your stack. That is not much.

You need discipline though if you are going to play from the blinds. If you called, and have a lower grouping hand, say groups 5-8, and don't get a **flush draw, trips, or two-pair**, be prepared to fold it up. Even an open-ended straight draw isn't so good from here.

Generally speaking, from the blinds, you will want to check. If you have the top hands, group 1, and are in either of the blinds, by all means, play them accordingly. AA and KK don't play well with a bunch of people in. AK doesn't play to its strength unless it's against ONE other guy. Basically everything else you will want to limp in.

Since this is the ONLY time you will play last, and you have one of the top hands, you NEED to raise it. Play it just as you would from late position. If you were UTG, it would be advisable to just call with AA or KK, and hope someone else raised so you could call that, or re-raise.

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But, from the blinds, you just raise with the group 1 hands.

If you limp in, with some bad hand, and hit your flop, it is up to you to bet it or check it. If you flop the nuts, ALWAYS check! If you have a pretty good hand, say two pair, I still always check. Check, check, check. This way, you “sort of” steal the button from the player on the button. If you check, whether you have a good hand, a draw, or even nothing, at least you get to see what everyone else does without committing any more chips.

Say it's early in the game, and everyone has about the same amount of chips. You'd hate to have, say A7 limped in, get an ace on the flop, and throw up 50 chips. Then as it goes around the board, and #5 re-raises to all-in over the top of you. I wouldn't advise going all-in with A7 at that point of the game. Odds are he was slowplaying AK, or hit 2 pair.

Either way, he most likely has a better kicker than your 7. So you fold it down, and are out 50 chips when you could have just as easily checked to see if nimrod #5 was coming out firing anyway.

Most good players know that amateurs raise while in the blinds. Tight players only raise in the blinds with the VERY top hands. If you've identified a player as a tight player, and he's raising from the blinds, if you don't have one of the top hands, something in group one or two, it'd probably be best to fold it up and watch.

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### Bluffing

Bluffing is an art. Only real fools flat-out bluff. For the most part, on the low buy-in SNG's, you will have to play everything real tight. Another disadvantage of the low buy-in SNG's is that most players are beginners and have a tendency to want to see your cards to "keep you honest". They will call down your bluff. The final disadvantage, when playing with beginners, is that they don't recognize the play you are putting on them. They don't know to fold, so they don't.

For the most part, on the low buy-in SNG's, don't bluff.

With that said, here are some useful tips for bluffing.

Bluffing isn't just taking any old hand and trying to win with it. Some folks do this occasionally, and get away with it, but really, it's financial suicide. You WILL run into players, time and time again, that actually HAVE the hand you are trying to represent. This happens a lot with a full nine or ten-person table.

The key to bluffing is to represent possible winning hands. Bluffing is done most easily in position. It is also a lot easier to bluff at a short-handed (6 players or less) table. With less hands being dealt, less cards are actually out there.

### A Bluffing Example:

You have Ten-Jack suited Diamonds in the 9<sup>th</sup> position. You raise the BB when it's your turn. The button folds, SB folds, BB calls and so do two others. Four hands are in to see the flop.

FLOP: 9d, 9s, 3c

You have basically missed the flop. You could catch running diamonds or suck out two cards to complete your straight. The first 3 players check, and now it's to you. What do you do?

Being that you raised pre-flop, the other players will assume you have something. They think you have a pair, or an Ace-something, or maybe even K-something. The pre-flop raise is the most likely reason everyone checked to you.

In this situation, I would bluff. It's not a major bluff. You could still suck out a straight or even a flush. But taking a raised pot on the flop, after missing the flop, is just good poker. You don't want the other players to catch something that helps them in this situation. By checking to you, they have shown weakness. You should capitalize now.

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Could one of them be putting a play on you? Yes they could be. They may be waiting for a check-raise. Doyle Brunson teaches that you can't live in fear of the check-raise. If one of them actually has the 9, they will show you. Then you'll have to lay it down.

In this example, if it was early, and the blinds were 10/15, and you raised it to 45 chips, there would now be  $(45 \times 4 + 10)$  190 chips in the pot. My bluff bet would most likely be 100 chips at this point. You could also bet the pot. I would then be hoping a 100-chip bet would drive the others off.

In this scenario, if someone calls, then you have some thinking to do. You tried to bluff at it and failed. If they called, I would guess they had the 9, or a pair of threes. Either way, you are pretty much done. But, you could still suck out a better hand in the case of the player holding the 9.

If you get a caller, then you had better hope the turn card helps you. Let's say you get a caller, the turn card comes 6h, no help. The caller checks to you. After such a terrible turn card, I'd be ready to call this hand quits. It would be very tough for me to commit any more chips to this pot. It would be very tough for me, at this point, to represent a hand that I tried, and failed to represent at the flop. I would probably just check it in, fold to a raise.

Say you get a caller, and the turn comes Qh. You've lost the flush possibility, but have an outside straight shot. The other player once again checks to you. In this case, I raise again, only larger, trying to drive the other player out. It'd be nice if the straight hits, but I really DON'T want to see the river card. In this situation though, after getting a caller, I would assume he has the 9. If the river doesn't help me, I wouldn't put any more chips in.

Almost nobody lays down a REAL three of a kind unless a very obvious straight or flush is on the board. If you get the straight with the river, you can try to break him. If not, pay him off and don't commit any more chips.

Okay, same situation, same hand, only you are in the BB. The button raised (just twice the BB this time), and you called with your 10-Jd. There are two other players behind you. The flop came 9-9-3 as before.

You check the flop. It goes around and the button checks. Lets say this time; a 6h falls on the turn. It is at this point; I would try to steal the pot. Since everyone showed weakness, it's time to take some initiative. You are in a VERY bad position, so all you will get at this pot is this one STAB. Better make it good.

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I would bet the size of the pot or so, if I could afford it. Because of your position, if anyone calls, you are done, and if anyone raises behind you, you also have to fold. Hopefully, you will take down the pot. What betting out of the blind does is force everyone behind you to see if the pot is worth it to keep playing.

It is better to win a small pot than lose a large one.

As you can see, bluffing is taking advantage of fears and using your position. Generally, if it's checked to you twice, you have to bet. Sure you may have nothing, but odds are, your opponents don't have anything either if they are checking.

Bad players, generally speaking, bet BIG when they are bluffing and conservatively if they have something. Watch out for this. This is why I recommend always betting pretty big, ESPECIALLY if you think you have something! Big betting is the only way to win a big pot.

I am not the world's greatest bluffer. I DO know WHEN to bluff. With the anonymity of the Internet, everyone has a great poker face. Betting your position, regardless of what cards you actually have, is what bluffing is all about. You can "feel" when the other players just want to give you the pot.

Try bluffing only after playing for a while. On the lower buy-in SNG's, a lot of folks just won't lay down their cards. At a full table, somebody usually has "it". It takes some guts, but it's a good skill to have.

Lastly, in the above situation, if my hand was 9-8 diamonds, played the same way, I would probably bet it the exact same way. That is the key, to bet the hand as if you have the hand.

If I am on the button, same situation, and I bet my 100 at the pot of 190 and everybody folds, you HAVE to show that you had the nine. At least early on. It is a GREAT label to have as being a player who bets big when he has a hand. The next time you raise, on a bluff, you can expect similar results. Fold, fold, and fold.

If you are having a tough time getting any action, as you are betting big on your good hands and folks just fold not letting you realize your hand's worth, you may want to show down a bluff bet. Either by someone calling you, or HOPEFULLY, winning the hand and showing the bluff cards. By doing this, you WON'T be able to bluff at that table anymore. BUT, you can expect some callers the next time you have a good hand.

I have more about bluffing in the "Super System" chapter of the book.

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### **BAD BEATS**

Bad beats, as I define it, is taking a winning hand and losing with it. Bad beats are no fun, but happen a lot more than the statistics say they should. The hardest part about bad beats is recovering from them.

Good Poker players will suffer MORE than their share of bad beats because good poker players are playing hands that are in the lead more than other players. If you can, you can look at a bad beat as a good thing. It means you were playing the hand correctly and had an advantage going into the showdown. THEY had to beat YOU. If the percentages work out, you win that percentage of the time.

Unfortunately, knowing you HAD the better hand and losing anyway doesn't do any good to your bankroll or chip count. Bad beats are just a necessary evil of Poker. Deal with it, and move on.

Yeah, I can't do it either. Bad beats tear me up more than just about anything because I DO know all the statistics. I know the supposed "percentages" of the other player catching a card. And most of the time that percentage is very low.

Here's some advice.

Do NOT get worked up because someone hit an outside straight or a flush against you on the river. As far as percentages go, those are "good" percentages with one card to come. Right around 17-19%. Almost one in five.

Do NOT get worked up if a guy with a pocket pair gets his trips on the flop and ends up with a full house to beat your straight or flush. All that has to happen is ANY of the other 4 cards (or 5, 4 of a kind) pairs on the board. You CAN get a bit peeved if he hits his pocket-pair trips for a boat on the river.

Do NOT think it is a "bad beat" if you are all-in against someone pre-flop and get beat. A bad beat doesn't happen until the river card. Just because you are taking your AA vs. his 7-2os pre-flop, don't expect to win. Realistically, in that situation, there are only 2 cards that will help you in the entire deck. If he pairs, and catches his trips or two-pair on the river, then THAT is a bad beat.

Pre-flop showdowns have WAY too many variables to try to predict what will happen. Just hope for the best, and don't take them too seriously. Unless you are beat on the river card.

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The real “Bad Beats” are the 4% draws against you on the river. These just tear me up. These bad beats have cost me a few hundred dollars, and I really don’t remember making any money getting a 4% draw to beat somebody. I’m just not in the “behind in the hand” situation very often.

### **How to Avoid Bad Beats**

Bad beats are going to happen. The KEY is to NOT play on TILT after they do. If you are lucky enough to suffer a bad beat and STILL have chips left over, consider yourself blessed. Usually, one bad beat begets another, and soon you are out of chips and out of the game.

As was discussed earlier, the only true way to avoid bad beats is to play correctly. Playing correctly puts you in situations where you have the absolute best percentages to win. There is an old saying, “Always Be Raising” or “If you are going to call you may as well raise.”

With those sayings in mind, a good player should ALWAYS raise the big blind pre-flop. Then only exception that I can think of is the late position limp-in where you are trying to see some cards for a minimum amount of chips.

In the better games, at the higher buy-ins, you don’t get to limp-in. Someone seems to always raise. Raising pre-flop eliminates the marginal “fluke” hands that end up giving you a bad beat. You have to make the other players think, and make a decision. This starts with raising the big blind.

More often than not, to a significant raise, the big blind will fold. The big blind gets a FULL bet in before seeing what cards are dealt. The odds of anyone getting a Group 1-4 hand are 11.3%. So, a little more than 10% of the time the BB will have a “great” starting hand. The other 88.7% of the time they will have a “good” hand at BEST! If you have a playable hand, make them pay to play.

The other knock on the BB staying in the hand is that once they pay to stay in, they are rewarded with terrible position.

Perhaps even more importantly, YOU don’t know what kind of hand they have because they put their money in blind. By raising the BB, you at least get SOME information about their hand. Without raising, the BB could have ANY two cards under there.

The BB has two strikes against it pre-flop. They put money in blind, and have terrible position. Raise the big blind. The big blind will give you more bad beats than anyone else. The small blind is second.

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Another way to avoid bad beats is to eliminate other players from the hand pre-flop. A lot of times I will see the UTG player call the BB, as he should if he's got a playable hand. Then the next guy calls, then the next, and the next etc. If you are in 7<sup>th</sup> position or so, a lot of folks will just call, even though they have a hand that should be raised. The fear is getting re-raised.

With two or three players in ahead of you, odds are one of them has a hand they like. They may be waiting to re-raise the raiser. Who knows? YOU don't want to play in hands where there are 7 players seeing the flop. That is a recipe for a bad beat. The more players that are in, the more possible hands that could be out there.

If two or three players ahead of you have called the BB, and you have a good hand, RAISE IT. Sure, you may get re-raised as someone with bad position was just waiting for someone to jump on. That is a risk. But, this is a hand you WANTED to PLAY right? Now you are playing for a raised pot, and odds are, anyone caught in-between he and you are probably going to fold.

In the same situation, and you felt like you should raise, but are REALLY afraid of your hand being inferior if someone re-raises, then treat your hand as a limp-in. Just call the BB. Now, if you are treating your hand as a limp-in, what is the rule?

### **If you don't have a four card flush draw, two-pair, or trips, fold it up!**

By treating your hand as a "limp-in", this is the rule your should live by when limping-in. Anything less, even though you are in the lead in the hand, could very easily result in a bad beat.

Bad beats are going to happen. Taking these simple steps helps you avoid the most common cause of bad beats. Don't play on tilt, raise the big blind, play limp-in hands only if you hit the flop.

Two years ago I took a bad beat where the guy needed running aces for the turn and river in a short-handed game. He got them, and it STILL burns me up thinking about it.

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### END GAME

If you've played correctly, played good hands, and not taken any bad beats, you WILL get down to the END GAME. The end game in an SNG is a totally different game.

I consider the end game, in an SNG, any time you are down to 4 or 5 players and the BB is 100 or higher. There are very specific rules to play by in the "short-handed" game, and I am going to tell you how to play, so that you can win, more often than not.

#### Steal the Blinds!

Once it gets down to a short-handed game, and the blinds are 50/100, it is time to watch what you play, but more importantly, steal the blinds on a consistent basis.

First off, you will need a decent hand. What's decent? With 5 or less players playing, the hands usually aren't going to be very good. Now granted, you have the same odds of a 72os as AA coming out as you do in a full ring. But, there are only 5 or less people seeing hands, not 10, so effectively, the odds are cut in half.

There are less hands out there is what I'm trying to say. So, a decent hand usually has at least one high card in it, A or K. At least. If you are suited, that's even better. If you get a pair, or a top 42 or 24 hand, even that much better. What you want to do, now that you have a decent hand, is steal the blinds.

The key to success at this point of the game is to build a bit of consistency. Do everything quickly. Press the buttons as fast as you can with no deliberation. **That is the key.** Usually, I will not try to steal the blinds in a 5-person game unless I have a pretty good hand, or I am on the button, or one guy over and nobody previous has called or raised.

The end game, and the battle for the blinds, is psychological more than actual card playing. In the end game, 2 people, the SB and the BB, put money in without seeing their hands. They may have KK or AK or AA, but more often than not, they have 83 os, 10 6os, or Q5. These are not good hands. These are folding hands.

You would most likely fold them at any other time during the game. You may play them when the blinds are 15, but at 100+? Think of how many crappy hands you fold, and also think of how many crappy hands you play because the blinds are small and nobody raised. During an entire game, there are a ton of hands like that.

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Now, all of a sudden, you are putting 100 chips in, which may be a large % of your stack, on a hand you wouldn't play for 30. Plus, with 10 people in, 25 cards are theoretically going to be dealt if it goes to the river. That's almost half the deck. In 5-man, it's 15 cards. In 3-man, it's 11 cards. 11 out of 52. That is not many.

Could you still pull a top 10 hand? Of course. If you do, you have to assume you are way ahead. In 4-man, there are only 8 cards dealt pre-flop. If you are dealt AA, KK, QQ, or AK, the odds aren't good that you'll be going up against anything worth playing. So it is a moot point if you get one of these premier hands. There is a way to play them, but I will show you how to play "decent" hands first.

Decent hands in the end game are usually anything with an ace or king involved. Two high cards are preferable, suited, even better, and any medium to high pair is a killer hand.

The way I play the end game, all you need is one of these decent hands. I am going to analyze this in a 4-person game. With 5 people in, be very careful. With 5 people in, there are still going to be good hands out there. If you figure, in a 10-person game, there is, on average, 2 good hands per deal, and they are supposed to showdown; in a 5-person game, there is one good hand.

This is all theoretical, but you will notice it to be true the more you play. Once the action gets down to 4 people, there is usually LESS than one good hand, so if you DO get a good hand, you have to feel you are in the lead.

In the 4-person game, there are 2 players that do not have to put money in each hand. If you are in the blinds, you most likely have a bad hand. You did not want to bet the hand you have, but the order of the game forces you to. So, when someone who is NOT in the blinds bets, don't you have to assume he has a better hand than your terrible 82os?

He VOLUNTEERED to play this hand. You were FORCED into it. This is the thinking in the end game. Pay the blinds, steal the blinds back, get ahead.

When you are out of the blinds, and have a decent hand, RAISE at least twice the blind. If you aren't so sure about your decent hand, then raise 3 or 4 times the blind. At 100, if you only raise to 200, more often than not, the BB will call.

### **You DON'T want that!**

You want them to fold, collect your 150 chips and move on. You are most likely playing, say, K7 os. This is not a good hand. Granted, the BB may have 83os still, but the 100-chip raise is affordable to see the flop, and make you question the weakness of his hand. Maybe he did catch something.

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If you are UTG, and raise, more often than not, the guy on the button will fold. Why would he want to get into a match with you, unless he has something decent, when it's a free hand for him and you've already raised?

By raising, you are in essence saying, "I have something decent, and it's going to cost you twice the blind to find out if you can beat it." So the button folds. Also, the SB folds, as he's on the button next hand, and he actually has to spend 3x the amount to see the flop as he's currently invested. So, more often than not, barring someone actually having a good hand, it will be you against the BB.

**DEFENSE:** The correct defense for this action is not just calling. If you are in the big blind, and someone is starting to raise over you, as I've described, if you have a "decent" hand, go all-in. Prepare for a call, just in case the raiser finally has something good.

I play this way all the time, and I just hate running into the all-in guy. You have to look at your K 3 os and say, "Do I really want this to be my last hand?" More often than not, I fold it down.

If you run into an all-in guy, you have to be wary from now on. You don't know if he's one of those guys until the second time he does it. The first time, maybe he actually had something. The second time, you know it's some sort of bluff, and you can expect it to continue.

If he gives you the all-in EVERY time you try to raise over the top, pre-flop, you can just start calling to the big blind with a decent hand. The next time you get a GOOD hand, you raise over the top. Say, AA, KK, QQ, or AK. You know the good hands.

He gives you the knee-jerk all-in, and you call is ignorant ass. After I take all his chips, or double up my stack, I usually throw a taunt in, such as, "Oops." Hopefully, this will tilt them, and someone else will knock them out. Because, rest assured, the next time you raise over the top, and they go all-in, they will have a pretty good hand. So you had better too.

Most of the time, these jerks are just taking exception to your raise and bluffing back. But if you only call the BB, they won't raise at all. Which brings us to our second phase.

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### **END GAME Phase 2**

So, the BB didn't fold, and he didn't go all-in. But, he did call you, and now you have to play. Flop comes, nothing.

What do you do?

**BET FAST!!!** If he checks to you, press the BET 100 or BET 200 button as fast as you can. **ALWAYS as FAST AS YOU CAN!** Why? To show no hesitation. YOU RAISED over the top. YOU saw the flop and RAISED AGAIN! What does this knucklehead sitting in the BB not understand? His 10 4 os just isn't going to be good enough.

You raise REGARDLESS of what is up there. If you actually catch something, it's the same thing. REPETITION! If you follow the same actions EVERY TIME, they can't possibly know what you actually have.

You want him to fold.

You actually only wanted him to give you his blind money, but now, you will take the raise money too. More often than not, the BB went in with a crap hand, he sees the flop, gets no help, and the raise is already sitting there waiting for him to act. He will fold.

Sometimes, these jokers actually call. Now you are into the turn card. He checks. Look at your hand. Is it still good? Are there many over cards? If you still have a good hand, or possibly the best hand out there, BET FAST AGAIN!

He may have had 3 cards that went together, then the turn card comes, he knows he's not going to get his straight, and he'll fold. Or, he was hoping to make his flush. But he just may call. And it's off to the river you go.

If the river doesn't complete an obvious straight or an obvious flush, you most likely have won. If he checks, don't bother putting more chips in. He may have been setting a trap. Just call, and if you win, fine, if he was indeed setting a trap, preparing for the check-raise, he kind of looks silly for not betting the river card.

Now, don't forget, **ALWAYS BET THE FLOP. ALWAYS BET IT QUICKLY!** No matter what you have. If he calls, he may have something, and you may be able to just check it in with the nothing that you have. Don't keep throwing money at it. If you have nothing and he starts raising, don't keep up the charade. Just fold. Take the loss. There will be better hands and more blinds to steal.

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**DEFENSE:** Again, the proper defense for the flop-raiser is the all-in. Or, if you do your fast flop-raise, and really have nothing, and the guy check-raises you, fold. Play a different hand.

To play the defense properly from the blinds, you check, he raises, you go all-in, and he folds. You'd better have something though. It's a LOT safer to do this defense pre-flop, because with 5 cards coming, anything can happen. With only 2 more cards coming, you know your odds of making the winning hand already. As does he.

If the same guy does the check all-in raise a couple of times, you know it's a bluff. So, pick your spot. If the flop doesn't actually give you much, just check, and check FAST. If he raises, fold. If you have trips, say, make sure you do the exact same raise with the exact same SPEED.

Hope that he goes all-in, call his ass, and give him the "Oops."

Better, if he was doing another bluff, and has absolutely NOTHING, say a Q4 as that hadn't paired the board, you just have to berate him. Something like, "I usually go all-in with that too." Or, "Nice hand. You do realize that Q and 4 aren't connected right?"

I don't mean to condone being an ass, but if someone is using this defense and gets caught playing nothing cards, they deserve the ass-chewing. Also, any way you can help them tilt, the better. Just expect BIG raises from them from now on. They will be trying to put you out. Just be ready with another good hand.

I cannot put enough emphasis on the SPEED of doing these actions. You have to do the same thing over and over. Once you beat one of these guys, and they actually see what you had, they will be more inclined to fold pre-flop.

So, once you have them in your pocket, it may get tempting to just raise regardless of what you have. Start raising with 45os and such. Don't do it. Let them see you fold a hand every so often.

Granted, it is a crap hand because you would raise if it's decent, but they don't know that. The more crap hands you fold, the more they will think that you are only raising with good hands. Which is somewhat true.

You want them to think you have a good hand, or good enough, every time. You CAN'T do this, unfortunately, against the all-in maniac raiser. If you see the maniac raiser raise a couple times or more, you know he can't always be doing it with decent hands. So, you have to pick your spots.

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This may mean you will be folding a lot more hands, including the blinds. That stinks, but what are you going to do? Call his all-in with 94os and HOPE he has worse cards? If he doesn't, are you ready to be done with the game? Bide your time. Double-up. Berate. This is especially true in the 4-man game.

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### ACTING!

There is a time to delay though. I emphasize over and over in this writing the need to do everything fast in the end game. The ONLY time you don't is when you actually have something.

I'm not talking about AA or KK here. I'm talking about when you have done your normal raise to steal, he calls, and you flop a monster! Whether it is trips, or a full house, or maybe a straight or flush, you have to now act to get him to throw all his chips in.

Since you have been raising and calling so fast all the time, and now you are hesitating, your opponent always assumes you aren't sure about your hand. This goes for every part of the game, not just end game.

How long do you have to hesitate? I usually wait until the game, at PartyPoker, starts beeping. Usually about a full 5 or 10 count. Any more, and he'll assume you stepped away or weren't paying attention. Then I put in my bet. Or, in the case of flopping the nuts, I check.

I really play it like I am apprehensive about putting any more chips in. If he is raising, it is just perfect. He raises, delay, delay, delay, and call. Next card. He raises again. Delay. Call. After the river card, if he hasn't put all his chips in, you are REALLY going to have to sell out. Wait, wait, wait, and then make an all-in "bluff" at it. Hopefully he calls, and he's out, or you've doubled up.

In a recent game, I was dealt K9 suited. A pretty decent hand for playing the end game. I, of course, raise over the top and he calls. Flop comes Q 9 4 with no flush possible. I have 9's. I bet. He calls. Turn is a 9. I have trips. I bet. He raises. I call. River is a 9. I have the Nuts.

How am I going to get him to put his chips in? Most people WILL NOT believe there is four of a kind out there. There rarely is when there are 3 on the board.

I, of course, don't bet right away. I delay until the thing starts beeping, then I put in a bet that will leave me some cash left over if I'm wrong. WHY?? Why not just go all-in?? I'll tell you.

With four of a kind, I don't expect him to call. I am hoping he has the full house and will call, but I don't want to scare him off. So, I delay a long time so as to imply that I am wondering if my hand will be good enough. Then, when I finally "decide" to play, I put in a bet that is not all-in.

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I want to imply that, if I'm wrong and my "bluff" gets called, and I don't win, that I will still have some chips left to play. If you put all your chips in, a LOT of times it means you are serious and the other guy will fold it up. Especially if he has a marginal hand.

But, to make a LARGE bet, and leave a little bit left behind, and not betting enough to put the other guy all-in, it implies that it is just a bluff, and you DON'T want him to call. Your contingency plan is being short-stacked in the event of him actually calling and beating your nothing hand.

He played it exactly as I thought he would. He was the large stack at that point. He saw my delay as weakness, and he saw through my pathetic bluff bet. As any good player should do with the large stack, he called, and RAISED to make sure I had to go all-in.

This is EXACTLY what I wanted, and what I was trying to sell. I sold it perfectly. I was not bluffing, of course, went all-in, and revealed my nut 9's. After I doubled up, I wrote to him and said I didn't think he'd call. He said he had the Q for a boat 9's full of Q's.

I asked him if he liked the delay. He said he loved it.

This is acting. You have to ACT when you are pretty sure you have a winner, or you have the nuts, and you want to get paid. This is especially true in the end game. You play fast, raise fast, call fast, and fold fast.

Then WHAM! You slow down.

You show a sign of weakness. In all your previous hands, it gets to you, you instantly raise over the top. He thinks, and then calls. Flop comes, he checks, you instantly raise. You are saying, "I raised pre-flop, and now I've seen the flop and it's made my hand better, so I'm raising again. What don't you understand?" It is at this point he usually folds.

But then, you catch a great flop, and your opponent sees you slow down. Check it around, or raise with much deliberation. He sees you as weaker than the other hands and tries to exploit it. This acting works just tremendously against the all-in raiser.

You can act pre-flop also. Say you actually get AA or KK and are in the SB. Take your time, delay it pretty good, and then just call the BB. A lot of times, since you've been raising every time, they will bet back into you, just to steal your increased blind money and not have to see a card.

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Hopefully, they will raise back all-in. Or, they may just want to see the flop for free. You see the flop, and check. See how long they will keep checking for. Hopefully, you will catch your trips AND bait them. Remember to delay on every decision.

More often than not though, if I have AA or KK, I play them exactly like any other decent hand. I raise over the top and hope for a call, thus doubling the amount I am going to make. Then I bet on the flop if I don't get trips. He will usually fold. So, at least, I secure double his BB investment.

With only calling to the BB, and not getting trips on the flop, and not raising, and slow-playing it, you are welcoming a chance to get beat. He could have caught two-pair. Or he might on the turn or the river.

Pre-flop, every hand has hope. I raise pre-flop, even with good hands, preying on that hope. Seeing the flop either increases confidence, or eliminates hope. If the hope is gone, he won't put any more chips into the pot. If he catches something, you don't want that either.

More often than not, when they call the raise pre-flop with their Q 4s, the flop won't help them, and they will fold to your raise. That is why you need to raise most often pre-flop. Get them to put in twice as much. That way, when the flop comes with 2 over cards, they are folding to any bet.

Gigging them for twice as much pre-flop is a tried and true way of winning the end game.

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### **RULE #2: DON'T BE 4<sup>th</sup>**

In a one-table SNG, only 3 spots are paid. You DO NOT want to be the 4<sup>th</sup> guy. Sometimes you can't help it, as you are too short stacked, or you take a bad beat and are out. But, for the most part, you can control it.

As long as the blinds don't totally take your stack away, you should play MUCH tighter. You want to steal the blinds as described above. Just be VERY AWARE of where everyone's chip count is, and when the blinds are going to go up again.

1200 chips is a lot of looks with a 300 blind, but not nearly as many at a 400 blind. Especially, if you are going to raise over the top. In that case, you had better be sure. I made a mistake today and finished 4<sup>th</sup>. I will tell you where I slipped up, so that hopefully, you can avoid a big mistake.

4-man game. I am UTG with 1200 chips. There's an ass to my left on the button. He has repeatedly re-raised me to all-in, and then I fold, so I am going to play tighter hands.

He has 3200 or so, as does the guy to my right in the BB. The player in the SB only has 260 chips. In order to finish in the money, all I have to do is wait for the guy in the small blind to lose a hand. With 1200 chips, I have been raising over the top with the 300 blind. This has been working well. I was a bit distracted, and this is how the end played out.

Initially, I did not notice the blinds go to 200/400. As I said, I was distracted. I got Q5 suited hearts. A pretty good hand to steal with. Not really paying attention, I hit the button that said, RAISE TO 800. So I have 800 in there and 400 in the bank.

The ass to my left calls, both of the blinds fold, as expected. This drops the guy in the SB to 60 chips. Flop comes, Kc, As, 7c. 2 over cards and NONE of my suit. I've got no way to win and I definitely don't want to go all-in, so I check.

The ass to my left bets 400 to put me all-in, so I fold. Deal comes; I notice that I'm all-in as the blinds are 400! I get K 10s and figure I'd be raising with this anyway. Guy to my left folds, the guy with 60 chips folds, of course. The guy in the SB calls. I REALLY wanted him to fold as I was just starting to realize what a mistake I had made last hand.

We flip over.

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I have K10. He has 77. I have 6 outs plus the straight draw and 5 cards to beat him. If you read the above “how to play pairs JJ-22” you know that this is almost EXACTLY the situation you want with a pocket pair. One-on-one.

Better yet if I would have had, say 6 3os. I would NEED 2 cards.

As it was, I only needed one. Of course, I didn't get it.

Was I mad that I didn't make a pair of either my K or my 10 in 5 cards? Of course, but I knew the odds of it happening weren't good. I was more tilted that I finished 4<sup>th</sup> because of my own error the previous hand.

With the Q5 suited, I made the raise because I was distracted and didn't really notice that the guy in the SB had only 60 chips, and I didn't notice the blinds had gone up.

What could have distracted me? Well, I play a LOT during the day, and I'm watching my kids. My 4 month-old daughter had just started screaming, so I was changing her poopy diaper and trying to play at the same time. Is this an excuse? Of course it is. I doubt ANY of the top poker players play with the kind of distractions I have to endure. But it's still an excuse.

In the same situation, undistracted, I should have known the blinds went up to 400. I also should have known that the guy to my left would call, or even raise me, as he had for quite some time and I'd never called him, as it was always an all-in call. I also would have noticed that the SB was down to 60 chips.

But, say I did raise and everything happened the same, and the ass to my left raised me all-in post-flop. I was probably beaten, but I hadn't called his raise but once all game. There were still a couple more cards to come. I could have gotten running 5's, running Q's or 10 J and probably had the nuts or tied for them.

I am thinking I should have called instead of letting my fate be decided by a hand I had no control over. Turns out, I got a good hand, and, in my opinion, got a bit unlucky to not beat the pair of 7's, but you can't win with a 25% draw all the time.

What I should have done was fold the Q5 suited.

In that same situation, with someone so close to being eliminated and putting me in the money, I should have hit fold. I would have been down to 800 chips. Then, the SB comes. If I don't get AA, KK, QQ, or AK, I should fold it down. I'm then down to 600 chips.

Now the guy with 60 chips is in the BB and he's all in. Again, I shouldn't bet unless I have AA, KK, QQ, or AK. If I did have those hands, I should raise them to put myself all-in. Anything else, fold it up. Wait until the guy with 60 chips gets eliminated.

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That's a little extreme. I suppose I'd play AQ, AJ, A10, and any of them suited. You just don't want to make a mistake. Fold just about everything down until you are in 3<sup>rd</sup> place. I'd hate to play AJ, have two K's come on the flop, and be eliminated in 4<sup>th</sup> place. Or even one K would do it. Folding is the best way to stay out of harms way.

By folding the Q5, I would have had a 400 chip look at my K10. The guy in the SB would have called, maybe raised with his 77. It would be tough NOT to call a raise with K10, but in this situation, with the guy with 60 chips watching and out of the hand, it would take DISCIPLINE not to lose any more chips. If the guy with 77 only calls, I should check, check, check. Unless I grab high pair, it isn't worth the risk to bet. So, I lose that hand.

I am in the SB, paying 200. My stack is now 600 chips. Unless I have a top 5 hand, fold it down. The next hand, I am on the button.

Mr. 60-chips is now in the BB. If both of the other guys call, the MOST he can get out of the hand with is 180 chips. As long as I don't call, he will be ALL-IN in the SB also. That is IF he wins while in the BB. So he will have to win back-to-back all-ins, or tie them, to stay in contention.

Again, if I have a top 5 hand, I should go ahead and play, as I'll need the chips to stay alive against the other large stacks. But anything less is introducing the risk of taking 4<sup>th</sup>, and being out of the money.

If I don't get a top 5 hand, I should just watch. I have 600 chips and am on the button. If the guy with 60 chips wins while in the BB, he will then be in the SB, also all-in. I can watch that hand too.

If he gets lucky and does win back to back through the blinds, I have a problem. I will be forced out by the time the small blind gets to me, as I have 600 chips left.

Hopefully, I will get a good hand and be able to stave elimination off for another round. It could happen. It may not. At this point, I am finally going to need some luck.

I can take a look at my big blind hand, and if it's good, play it. Or, I can always fold it and try to win with my small blind hand, sight unseen.

This being said, how many hands have I seen since I decided to fold the Q5 suited? There was the K10s. My button hand. My UTG hand. My big blind hand, and my small blind hand. Five hands.

Hopefully I will have caught something decent in those five hands. You just have to know your situation. Finishing in the money is better than finishing out of it. Don't be fourth. Do everything you can to not be fourth.

## **BONUS:**

### **What I Have Learned from the "Super System"<sup>1</sup>**

Doyle Brunson's book, "Super System", is a great read that has been around, in various forms, since 1978. This is an excellent book to learn how to play ALL forms of poker. Doyle's section on No Limit Hold'em is the section I have read a few times. Here are my thoughts on Doyle's System and how it compares to what I've written above.

In "Super System", Doyle writes how much he likes small suited connectors. He says that 87s is his favorite hand for No-limit Hold'em. If you notice above, 87s is a group 7 hand. Doyle says he'll most always play this hand, and a lot of the time, he'll raise with it. Since reading this in his book, it has become one of my favorites also. Here's why.

87s is a good hand to raise with, because nobody can put you on it, and it's easy to get away from. What does a pre-flop raise mean, most-times? You have Ax, Kx, or a pair of some sort. That's what I assume of a pre-flop raiser.

So say Doyle raises 87s(spades) pre-flop, and say, he gets 2 callers. Flop comes Qc, 9s, 5s. This is a pretty broken board to the other two players. Most of them will assume Doyle has Ax, and the guy holding A Qs (hearts) has to think he has high pair-high kicker.

With a 9 and a 5 on the board, because of Doyle's raise, he has to believe those two cards are blanks except for the possible flush. In this situation, Doyle HAS to bet again. He has 17 outs.

When the 6h comes on the turn and an Ah comes on the river, I imagine the guy with AQ will be all-in. Then Doyle just takes all his money. 87s is a great hand to win a LOT of money with, or lose a little.

Same situation. Raised 87s(clubs) pre-flop. Two callers. Flop, As, Kh, 10d. With high cards in the mix, it is easy to get away from the hand. You know someone made their pair, possibly two. With no chance at a flush, this hand is pretty worthless and EASY to get away from. This goes for all small connectors, suited or not.

Besides playing the small suited connectors, Doyle teaches how to play AGGRESSIVELY all the time. He shows you how betting aggressively will give you the upper hand over time.

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<sup>1</sup> Doyle Brunson, Super System: A Course in Power Poker (New York: Cardoza Publishing, 2002) 419-514.

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His quote, “If you are going to call... you might as well bet.” pretty much summarizes his style of play. Other players will fear you, and when they do get a hand that is better than yours, they will show you by betting aggressively. Their aggressive betting will save you money in the long run.

He also shows you the correct way to bluff.

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### **Bluffing, Doyle's Way**

In "Super System", Doyle never advocates just straight-out bluffing. That is, playing nothing hands and trying to fool everyone else with his raises. This is foolishness. What he does talk about is playing your position and the table.

Doyle has an entire section devoted to what he does, and why, with small connectors. Most of it is bluffing. I found this section shocking, as I wasn't doing ANY of it. What follows, is Doyle's situational bluffing with small suited connectors.

Mr. Brunson writes of what he does in every situation with the small suited connectors. He breaks it down into three parts. What he does when the flop:

- ❑ Completely misses his hand
- ❑ Gets a little help
- ❑ Gets a LOT of help

When he gets some help on the flop, he usually bets it quite fast. Since I am mentioning his bluffing, I'll deal with when he completely misses his hand.

### **Complete Miss**

What Doyle decides to do when he completely misses his hand with small suited connectors is TOTALLY dependent on what happened pre-flop and what his position is.

The example in "Super System" has him holding 76s(diamonds) and the flop comes AAK with no diamonds. Before I read his book, I would just get out of the hand, regardless of position. Not Doyle. Here's how he advises how to play it.

From almost any position, if he had been the raiser pre-flop, he'd just flat-out raise again. He figures, if somebody else got a part of the flop, they would re-raise him, and he'd be out.

More often than not, he thinks, most folks will fold to the post-flop raise because Doyle had RAISED pre-flop, gotten 2 aces, and raised again.

This is bluffing, but it is also good strategy.

This situation is if Doyle RAISED pre-flop. If he had just called the big blind, most often, he'll just check, and check. If anyone bets at it, he's out. In a late position, he says he still may raise if it's checked to him twice, which would be a bluff.

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In the above situation, if an opponent calls his raise, he's kind of in a pickle and needs to decide if the guy is drawing i.e. doesn't have a made hand. Most often he'll just check it out and give up the pot.

You have to figure out the REASON he called your bet post-flop. In order to keep making stabs at the pot, you have to BELIEVE that he is drawing toward something. If you believe that, then you have to SELL that you have the Ace or the King.

If, after the turn card, you still think he is still drawing toward a hand, then you HAVE to bet again. Think about it. If you actually DID have an ace, and you raised pre-flop, and raised after 2 aces came up, why would you stop raising after the turn card unless that card MAY complete a straight or a flush for the other guy.

If the 4<sup>th</sup> card is a total blank, you pretty much have to bet. If he calls again, you had better hope you put him on the correct hand before you are all-in on the river.

When you COMPLETELY miss your hand with the small suited connectors, you want to win with your bluff ON THE FLOP. You don't want to see any more cards. You want to win it right there. You want to be seen as the aggressor.

This is where putting people on hands is a big factor. If you are in an SNG with 10 people at the table, in the same situation, I would put the guy on having an Ace or King and get out after I was called on my bluff bet after the flop. Most people will call a pre-flop raise with an A or a K in their hand. The more people at the table, the more likely one or more of them have an A or K.

A quote from Doyle, "You might find it difficult to continue betting your hand when you know you don't have anything. You may think it takes a lot of courage to do that. And it does. But, all it really is, is good Poker."

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### **Betting, and the “Super System”**

Doyle Brunson is a legend in the No-Limit Hold'em arena. He's won the WSOP twice. The “Super System” has been called, “the greatest Poker book ever written.” Nobody can take away any of Doyle Brunson's achievements. I highly recommend reading “Super System” if you get a chance.

That said, his book, and my book, are two totally different species. Doyle has mainly played in traveling ring games where people come and go as they please. If you are out of cash, you just hit the cash machine or pull some more out of your wallet. Or get more credit from the house.

MY book has been written for Sit-n-go games, Satellites, and tournaments. This kind of poker game has everyone pay the same buy-in and gives everyone the same amount of chips. When you are out of chips, you are out of the game.

THIS is the kind of poker you see on television. Tournament Poker, I feel, is the way to have the most fun playing poker.

ALL of Doyle's methods do transfer over to the tournament games in some way. No-Limit Hold'em is No-Limit Hold'em. In ring games, the blinds don't go up. You can sit there and bide your time and play the best hands, then really try to score when you get them. Much more so than Limit Hold'em.

But, in tournament No-Limit, the blinds are always going up. If you don't win more chips, the blinds themselves will knock you out of the tournament, or SNG. The tournament format makes you protect the chips you have, and forces you to try to double up over and over.

Doyle's betting system is GREAT for the type of game he plays, and it can be used at every level of No-Limit Hold'em. I say it “CAN” be used. There is really only ONE problem I see in tournament games with Doyle's betting system.

What Doyle calls a “reasonable” bet, is a bet the size of the pot. This may be great for his game when the funds are only limited by your pocketbook, but in a tournament game, especially early, everyone has the same amount of chips. When you lose those chips, you are done. Here's an example.

You are in a 10 person SNG at a \$10+1 table at PartyPoker. Everyone starts with 800 chips and the blinds are 10/15. You are UTG, and are dealt the 76s example used above. You call the 15 chips, as you are UTG, and EVERYONE behind you calls also. Now there are 150 chips in the pot.

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If you get a little help on the flop, say 7-2-3 flops, you may want to make a bet as you have high pair. Doyle's reasonable bet would be the size of the pot, or 150 chips. I can guarantee you, if you make a 150 chip bet from the 3<sup>rd</sup> spot with everyone in, you WILL get some folks out of the hand. That is a fact. Unfortunately, with 10 people in, the odds are that you will get re-raised, or called by more than one person.

With 2 callers, there are 600+ chips in the pot. If, after the turn or the river, you decide to make a "reasonable" bet, you will basically be all-in. You had better hope you have the best hand, but without more help on 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>, you are probably out of the game.

Doyle's system of betting IS very aggressive. He always wants to win BIG pots. Generally speaking though, his style of betting doesn't work for SNG's until later in the game.

Will a 150-chip bet on the flop deter some folks from seeing the turn? You BET it will. Of course, a 75-chip bet would probably do the same thing. (1/2 the pot) Or a 60-chip bet. (4x the BB) But you do want action, and you want to get the most value for your hand, every hand. You do this by betting and staying aggressive. HOW aggressive is the question.

Your 150-chip bet will label you as a maniac in many other players' minds. That's fine. You DO want them to fear you and NOT bet with you until they have something. They are easy to avoid then. But, most likely, everyone will fold that hand, and you collect the 150 chips.

Not many folks will want to risk almost 25% of their stack unless they really have something. And that's another way to bet. The % of your stack. Maybe your pair of 7's was worth 10% of your stack to gamble with. Then that would be an 80-chip bet.

By putting in 150 chips, you are pretty much saying that you DON'T want to play the hand anymore and would like to pick up the chips and move to the next hand. This size of bet, even though sanctioned by Mr. Brunson, can be seen a lot of the time as a blatant bluff. You only bet 1x the pot, but you bet 10x the BB. You may be re-raised to all-in. That is very likely.

If you are going to follow Doyle's instructions and make "reasonable" bets like this, you have to be prepared to be all-in. If you put in your 150 chips saying, "My top pair 7's is going to be good enough to win this hand." you have to be prepared to throw the rest of your chips in there to prove it. Especially at the lower buy-ins.

By betting the 150, everyone isn't going to instantly assume you've made two-pair. The guy holding A7s could see your oversize bet (due to being 10x the BB. Doyle calls this a reasonable bet) as a bluff, and raise you all-in. He has high-pair, high-kicker. Now you have a decision to make.

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If you call his all-in, you are down to ONLY the 6's helping you, while an Ace does not come up. 3 cards (the three sixes) out of 45 (52-your 2-his 2-flop 3). You have two 6.67% draws at it. Not a very good percentage to stay in the tournament. Lets see your other option. Folding.

If you fold after having thrown in almost 25% of your stack post-flop, you will be seen as a bluffer. Being seen as a bluffer can definitely work in your favor because you will get action next time. You are also down to less than 650 chips. I would advise though, after backing down, the next time you are going to make a "reasonable" bet, make sure you are willing to go all-in with it if need be. After the other players see you cower, they will continuously try to put you all-in.

Have a good hand, and take their money.

The betting system Mr. Brunson uses is aggressive and IS designed to get people out of the pot after the flop. His aggressiveness allows him to pick up small pots continuously. It also makes other people play back at him when they actually have something, so Doyle can avoid costly mistakes a lot of the time. This system works VERY well in ring games.

In a ring game, if Doyle makes his move, puts it all-in, gets called and loses, he can always get more cash, put it in play, and try to win it back. Unfortunately, in a tourney, when you are all-in and lose, you are done. This is why his betting system needs to be revamped for tournament play.

So, how SHOULD one bet? Aggressively. Always be betting. By betting, you create action. Other players fear your aggression, and eventually, only play the best hands back at you. This saves you money in the long run. If you KNOW they will only bet against you with good hands, you just have to know if YOUR hand is good enough.

Pre-flop raises should be 2x-4x the big blind. After the flop, your aggressiveness, and the amount you raise, should dictate what you are trying to do. Do you want to force people out of the pot, or keep them in? Do you only want 1 or 2 callers? As Doyle says, most of the game is played after betting on the flop. That's where the money changes hands. That's where you win most pots.

As I've said before, I like to limp-in to a LOT of pots at the lower blinds. If you catch something good, **trips, two-pair, flush/straight draw**, it is well worth the initial investment as you may end up breaking someone.

In games with better players, I DON'T get to limp-in very many hands. There is most ALWAYS a raise pre-flop. At a 10-person SNG, there are just too many possible hands out there every deal. You WANT to raise pre-flop to eliminate all the borderline hands. You don't want to get beat because someone limped-in J7os.

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But, if you raise too little, too many people will stay in the hand. Plus, they will feel they are more “pot-committed” having put in, say, 2x the big blind. With more people in the pot, it also skews the pot odds to keep more people in.

So, at the lower blinds, I would say the MINIMUM you should raise, pre-flop, is 3x the BB. So, if it's a 15 blind, you should put in 60 chips. It's actually only a 2x “raise”, but it will deter more people than just raising to 30 chips. It should go without saying that you ONLY want to do this with hands you WANT to play. Good hands. Bad hands, you still want to limp-in or fold.

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### **My Conclusions of the “Super System”**

After reading Doyle Brunson’s book, “Super System”, my outlook on the game of No-Limit Hold’em changed. I took away three main points that were illustrated above.

- 1) Play Small Suited-Connectors
  - a) Playing small suited-connectors is Doyle Brunson’s bread and butter for No-Limit Hold’em. Most of these hands don’t show up on the Hand Groupings charts, but are definitely worth playing. Doyle made a career out of them.
- 2) Bet Aggressively
  - a) Nothing will make you more money in the game of No-Limit Hold’em than constantly being the aggressor. Once the other players fear your aggressiveness, they will just give you pots.
- 3) Bluff in Betting Situations
  - a) If you raise pre-flop and totally miss your hand, you don’t necessarily have to give up the pot. Raise again and see what happens. If someone DOES have the hand you are representing, they will usually, and foolishly, show you they have it, and allow you out of the pot anyway.

These bits of wisdom helped change a lot of my strategy in No-Limit Hold’em, and that’s why I passed them on to you. Although I disagree with the DEGREE of Brunson’s betting aggressiveness, at least in early tournament and SNG games, his beliefs are easily adapted to any no-limit game.

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### Conclusion

Thanks for reading my book. You should feel you are a much better Hold'em player now. The End Game section is the section that will save you the most time in learning and make you the most money.

Texas Hold'em is a pretty simple game. It does have many nuances that aren't obvious to the beginning player. With the information I have given you, I hope you become wildly profitable and kickback some to me. Or win a WSOP and tell everyone starting out to read this manual.

I will go over the basic points I have given you, and if you have missed any of it, go back and re-read it. These are the "rules of the game", the important points, and need to be followed EVERY TIME you sit down to play. Whether an SNG, a Home Game, a Ring Game, or a tournament, these points will always give you a better chance at success.

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### **Basic Rules to Playing Winning Hold'em**

- ❑ Play only games you are comfortable with the stakes. If you feel you have too much money at risk, you won't play your hands correctly, or aggressively.
- ❑ Play only good starting hands.
- ❑ Raise your good starting hands pre-flop.
- ❑ Limp-in with bad, or mediocre hands ONLY at the low blinds and ONLY play the hand if you get **trips, 2-pair, or a 4-card flush or straight draw**.
- ❑ Play your position. It is much smarter to raise pre-flop from a late position than from an early position. From a late position or, even better, the button, you can play worse hands and get away from them with less expense.
- ❑ Know your hand groupings, but also keep an eye out for small suited connectors. You can win BIG pots with the connectors.
- ❑ ALWAYS beware of a flush. Especially if playing at PartyPoker. If 5 or more people are in to see the flop, odds are ONE of them will be drawing to the flush.
- ❑ Bet aggressively with good hands. BET YOUR HANDS!
- ❑ Try to win most hands after the flop.
- ❑ With only 4 or 5 players at the table, start playing the END GAME. Raise, and play, everything quicker and consistently.
- ❑ In an SNG, DON'T BE 4<sup>TH</sup>!

Thanks again for taking the time to read my book. I hope that I have helped you get a better grasp of the inner-workings of Hold'em. If you internalize all that I have written here, YOU WILL be a GOOD Hold'em player.

More importantly, your game will be honed for tournament play. Partypoker.com has a couple of \$5+1 tournaments every day. The one I play most often is the 1:45AM Central Time game. They usually get close to 1000 participants and the winner gets around \$1000. They pay up to 125-150 spots most of the time.

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Generally, it takes over 4 hours to finish one of these tournaments. I finished in the top 70 the last time I played and it took 3+ hours to finish there. You will NOT find a better, cheaper tournament to learn how to play Hold'em and see the amount of hands you will, for a cheaper price.

If you ultimately want to play in the WSOP someday, you have to practice your tournament play. Ring game experience is good but it just isn't the same. To be good at tournament Hold'em, you have to practice tournament Hold'em. That's why I advocate playing the Sit-N-Go's as I do.

I use the SNG's as my moneymaker's. It's a LOT easier to beat 9 other players than 19 or 29 or 999. If you want more of a "tournament feel" without having to sit and play for hours, play a two or three-table SNG. You will still get the experience of other players, or yourself, moving to different tables at various times, but you will only still have to invest an hour to an hour and a half of your time to win.

Whatever stakes you choose, and whatever style of play, whether Ring Games, Home games, or SNGs/Tourneys, I wish you the best of luck in all your Hold'em endeavors. It is a FUN game. Playing it correctly makes it more fun because you win more often.

Winning is fun!

If you feel this book has helped you, I would gladly accept any testimonials at my email of [august@onlinepokerbook.net](mailto:august@onlinepokerbook.net) The best testimonials will most likely be added to the website.

If you have any further questions about anything contained in this book, or otherwise Hold'em related, email me. I will be glad to help in any way that I can!