



THE FREEROLL

POKER STRATEGY YOU CAN USE

PREMIER ISSUE

Bad Bet Sizing: When is a Raise Not a Raise?

When I raise, I want every person left in the hand to think, "I am not sure what I should do." Why do I want that? Because the alternative reaction is, "This is an easy decision." Here is a typical situation that falls into this bad category.

Three limpers at \$1-\$2 and someone raises to \$7 from the button when the pot already holds \$11.

The person in the small blind is going to be fairly certain to be able to put in \$6 to see a \$28-\$42 pot. This is unlikely to be the right odds to play out of position, but he will often take it. The \$5 call is automatic for most limpers, and each caller makes the next more likely.

The button gets virtually no chance to take the pot down pre-flop. The Button is likely to be the last to act in a 4-6 person pot. This pot is going to be bloated, and hand ranges will be very hard to predict since they are really just the limping ranges. If the Button gets beat by some really wonky two pair in this spot, it is their own fault.

What kind of raise is going to give the limpers a tough decision? Imagine we are on the Button with three limpers. Our call makes the pot \$11. At minimum, we should raise the value of the pot by making it \$13. Because each limper knows his call will cause more people to call after him, they are more likely to call. Think about this, how often have you heard, "I would have called if someone else would have called."

Actually, because people are so likely to call raises at \$1-\$2, I have a standard raise of about \$10-\$12 plus one big blind for every limper. That means I would raise to \$16-\$18 here. In all but the wildest games each limper is going to really have to consider if they should call here.

What if I have a real hand and I don't get any action? That is fine with me. Picking up \$9 without a fight with Aces is a decent result. The reason that is a decent result is that I am just as likely to be making that raise with TT, AK, A3s, KJs. Those hands are quite happy with the same result.

I am in there raising the limpers from the button a lot. The opponents just don't know if I have a "real hand" or not. This makes their decision hard, and they make mistakes on hard decisions.

-Doug Hull

Author of *Poker Plays You Can Use*

www.ThreeBarrelBluff.com

More poker tells in Rounders (Besides KGB's Oreo)

-Zachary Elwood page 4



Monopoly tilt?

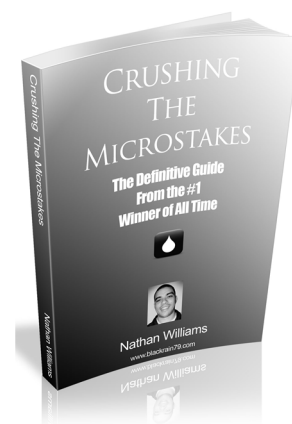
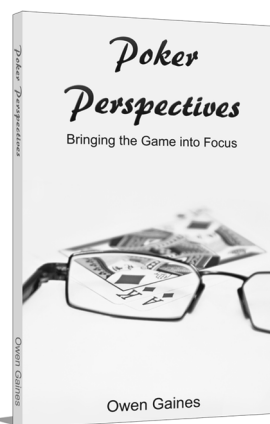
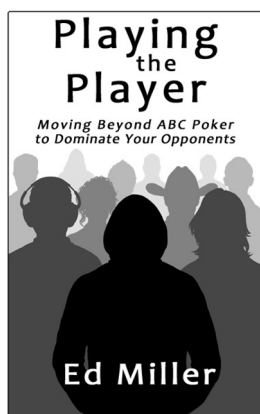
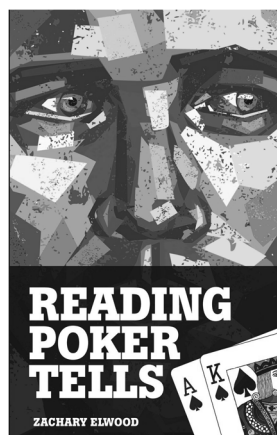
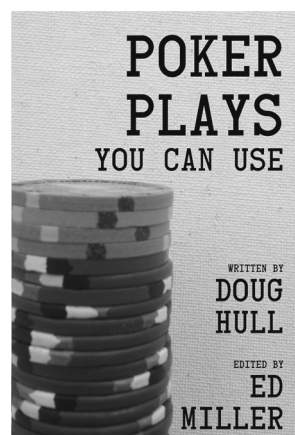
-Owen Gaines page 3



The Minimum Raise

-Ed Miller page 5

Writing from best-selling authors



Calling With Nothing On The River



-Ed Miller author of Playing the Player
and many others...
www.NotedPokerAuthority.com

The last time I played live I called a bet on the river with just ten-high. Here's what happened.

I raised a limper from the button with T9s. The flop came something like K65. My opponent checked, I made a normal-sized c-bet, and he called. The turn was a Q. He checked, I fired a good-sized second barrel, and he called. The river paired the 5, and my opponent bet out for about 1/4 pot.

I called because I thought there was a good enough chance that he was betting as a bluff, and I thought a lot of the hands he could have that would be bluffs would be straight draws around the 65, so my ten-high would actually be good.

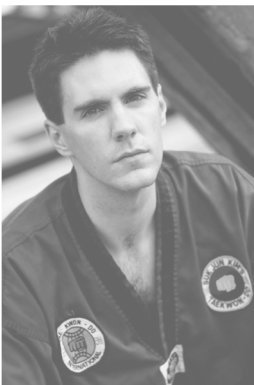
But in this case, calling had something else going for it. My opponent was a bluff-mucker. When you play live, sometimes you'll find yourself up against players who never show their bluffs when called. They'll just muck their hand. That's what this guy would do. If he bluffed and got called, he would just say "nice call" and muck his hand.

In limit hold'em I used to take advantage of these guys by calling with nothing. Sometimes the pot was large enough compared to the final river bet that I thought it was worth it to call with any two cards just for the chance to see him muck without a showdown. In other words, I thought he'd muck often enough that a call would show an auto-profit.

In no-limit I don't think the situation comes up as often (particularly because bluff-raising can work better because you can sometimes get your opponent off "real" hands), but it's something to keep in mind. If you know a guy will muck a bluff rather than show it down, you don't always need to have a hand to call.

Obviously this doesn't work online.

Poker Is a Skill: How to Stop Losing



-Paul Christopher Hoppe
author of Way of the Poker Warrior
www.PokerIsASkill.com

Are you happy with your poker results? If your answer is "yes," that's awesome. Go you! My colleagues here at *The Freeroll* have some articles which might help you get even better results. But if your answer is "no," then don't despair. You're in the right place.

In this column, I'll show you critical concepts that you can use to improve your results. In this first article, we'll focus on **game selection**, the skill of choosing your opponents wisely. Regardless of whether you play live or online, Limit or No Limit, Holdem, Omaha, or any other form of poker, this is one of the most important skills you can learn.

Play with players weaker than you

If you hang around winning poker players, you might hear them talk about game selection. That's because the easiest way to improve your poker results is to find

weaker players to play against. The key is not how good your opponents are in an absolute sense. What matters most is that they play worse than you do.

If you were the second-best player in the world and you insisted on playing heads up (1-on-1) against the world's best, you would lose money. You might get lucky sometimes and have a winning session. That might even happen fairly frequently. But if you played often enough and you played long enough, you would eventually lose all of your money to this opponent.

Let's say instead that you were the world's second-worst player. If you were lucky enough to find the world's worst player and play that hapless fellow heads up, you would be playing with an edge. Poker is all about finding edges and exploiting them. It's about putting your money in the middle when you have a better chance of winning than your opponent does. The first step is putting your chips down at the right table.

These are extreme examples. Odds are, you're not the second-best or second-worst player in the world. There is a lot of middle ground here. Sometimes it's hard to ascertain your opponent's level of skill. It takes knowledge, experience, and observation. *The better you understand how to play poker, the better you'll be able to judge your opponents and the better you'll be able to select your games.*

So how do I find players worse than me?

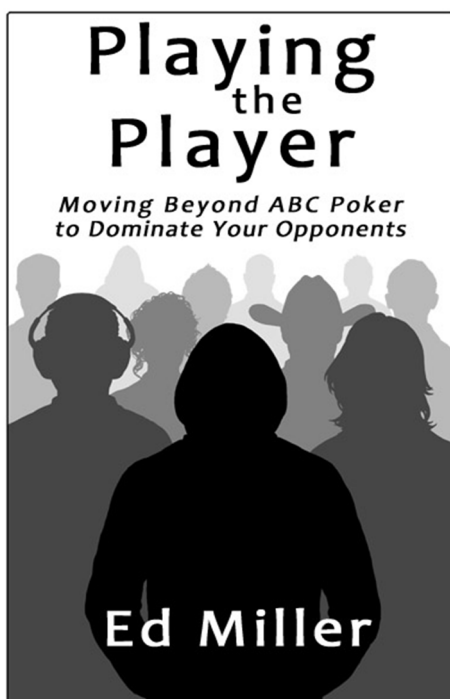
There are a few ways to identify soft opponents, but the first thing you can do is find the games where they're most likely to be playing. In general, lower stakes games feature weaker opposition. Some cardrooms or online sites may tend to have weaker players than others. If you know any winning players, you might try talking to them, but not everyone likes to publicize their favorite hunting grounds.

Here's one unfortunate truth I've learned about low-stakes game selection: the worse a casino or poker site is run, the worse the players are likely to be. If a site has terrible software, few professional players are likely to put up with it. If the managers of a cardroom do not understand the rules of poker, solid players will often look elsewhere. If you're willing to put up with a little discomfort, you might have the softest games all to yourself.

Things can be different at higher stakes, where players are more selective about where they play. Even bad higher stakes players often have more knowledge about the game, and they expect a better experience for their money. They usually *have* more money. Some of the highest stakes games can have terrible players in them, but these are people who seem to lose on purpose. You get a lot of intelligent people who are capable of playing reasonable poker, but they enjoy gambling it up. Just because someone plays like an idiot doesn't mean they're actually an idiot. Good poker is a choice and a commitment.

In order to spot bad players, you need to know what they're doing wrong. That means you need an idea of how to do it right. The more subtle points will come with time, but in general, you'd like to play against players who play way too many hands – terrible hands in bad situations – and call a lot when they're unlikely to win. *Play with people who put money in the pot against the odds.* People who like to gamble.

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Available at NotedPokerAuthority.com



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Just a Game



Owen Gaines— Author of [Poker's Postflop Course Part 1 The River](#),
[Poker Math that Matters](#),
[Hole Card Confessions](#),
& [Poker Perspectives](#).

This excerpt first appeared in [Poker Perspectives](#)

"Hold'em is to stud what chess is to checkers."

- Johnny Moss

Early in 2005, I was just starting to make some decent money playing Hold'em. I was still learning a lot about the game and spending a ton of time studying it. I was eating and sleeping poker.

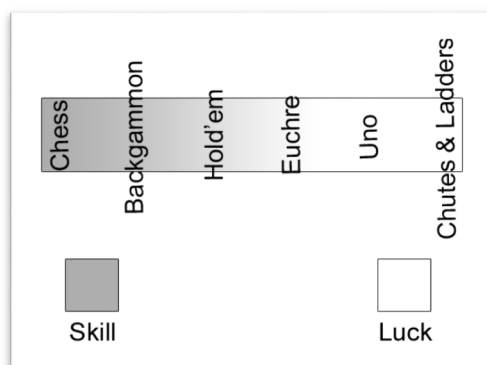
Then one night, I dreamt I played Monopoly for a living. "How strange," I thought. The dream was an eye-opener. I awoke with an epiphany: Poker is just a game.

I guess I always had thought about poker differently since it's generally played with real money; that set it apart in my mind. Poker was something else to me; something more spectacular than just a game. I was wrong.

Poker *is* just a game!

It's a game just like Uno, Stratego, Euchre, Monopoly, Chutes and Ladders, and so many others. This seems ridiculously obvious, but I wasn't thinking about poker as I thought about other games. But once I realized poker was just another game, I began drawing comparisons. As I did this, I started gaining the proper perspective about poker. This was the first real step toward developing a good mentality for dealing with mental beatings poker inflicts on its participants.

In Mason Malmouth's *Poker Essays*, he talks about how Hold'em is a game where there is an interesting ratio of luck and skill. The more a random event impacts the outcome of a game, the greater the amount of luck in the luck-to-skill ratio. Mason argues the ratio in Hold'em is such there's ample luck involved, which keeps a novice coming back because he's winning from time to time (by getting lucky). Yet, there's sufficient skill involved, which gives an informed player a significant advantage over the novice.



Considering the luck-to-skill ratio in poker got me thinking about others games. If we visualize the luck-to-skill ratio on a continuum, we can think about where different games might be placed.

The left side of the figure represents games of complete skill. Perhaps a game on this extreme side would be chess. The edge an informed player has in a game like this is enormous. The uninformed player has no hope of winning. Obviously, the expert would like to play this game for money as often as possible.

The right side of the figure will represent games in which only luck is present. There is no edge available to either player (whether they know it or not). Perhaps a game in which this is the case would be Chutes and Ladders. You can't even lose on purpose.

Starting at the right side and moving left, a game like Uno has an extremely heavy luck element. The cards you are dealt and the cards you draw are all random. However, unlike Chutes and Ladders, some skill impacts the outcome of the game. This skill includes variables like how you play your wild cards and whether or not you say "Uno" when you have one card left.

More towards the middle of the continuum would be a game like Euchre. The cards dealt are again random, but how you play the cards and what you bid play a heavy role in the game's outcome.

As we move further to the left, we may now put a game like Hold'em on the continuum. The cards dealt to each player and the board cards are random; however, the betting choices possess an enormous impact on the game's conclusion.

Further yet to the left could be a game like Backgammon. The luck element is still present with the roll of the dice; however, the skill factors in the game are almost insurmountable over large samples.

Games also can be open or closed (or mixed). By a closed game, I mean one in which all components of the game are hidden. A game like this could be demonstrated if I were to hide a coin in one hand, close both my hands, and ask you to pick the fist enclosing the coin. There is nothing exposed in the game.

On the other side, chess would be an open game. All the pieces are exposed to each player. The presence of hidden aspects in a game lengthens the amount of time necessary for skill to overcome luck.

With the use of hole cards, Hold'em has a hidden component. However, this characteristic of a Hold'em game can oscillate. As we learn about our opponent's static strategy (i.e., our hand-reading improves), the game becomes more open and the hidden nature of our opponent's hole cards is reduced. This information allows us to use more skill and more quickly realize an advantage.

Examine the game you are playing. Uncover its character. Get in tune with the game's composition. Then you can understand what to expect. When you resist the nature of the game, you set yourself up for disappointment and pain.

Disappointment and pain is not why we play a game. When you find yourself not having fun and/or experiencing some form of pain when you're playing poker, think about why you're feeling that way.

When you sit down at a poker table, you are submitting yourself to the game's temperament. Are you expecting something from the game it doesn't provide? If so, you'll need change your thinking.

Understanding poker as a game helps us see it in proper perspective. Imagine someone making the following posts in a monopoly forum.

"They always land on Free Parking! What can I do?"

"I have my hotels set up, but they keep landing on the utilities instead of my property! What can I do?"

"I keep going to jail! What can I do?"

"They get all the good chance cards! What can I do?"

What can you do? The answer is nothing. That's the luck side of the game. Now, would it make sense to get upset about that in the game of Monopoly and start mortgaging all your hotels and making stupid trades? Of course not!

Monopoly tilt!

Yet, we do that very thing in Hold'em when we get upset and start playing badly. People are going to suck out! That's the luck element.

Perhaps if I were to take the analogy a bit further with Monopoly, I could make a version of the game like this. To begin the game, you randomly distribute the properties to the players (some people do this anyway to make the game go faster). Then, you look at your properties and decide if you want to play or not.

Some people may play no matter what properties they have – loose Monopoly players.

Some would wait until they had a couple Monopolies already, and then decide to play – tight Monopoly players.

Of course, with some Monopolies already in hand, you have a better chance to win. However, how you play the game after you get started is going to have a large impact on your results – postflop Monopoly.

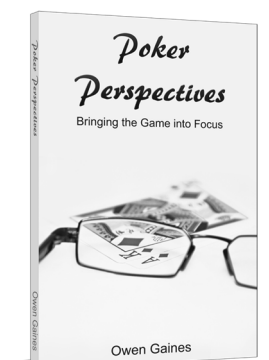
There will be times when you start with five monopolies, but your opponent just gets lucky rolls and you lose anyway – Monopoly suck outs.

The skill level of your opponents will also determine how likely you are to win. If they start with any cards, that's great. If they make stupid decisions in the game like making any trade you offer and never building houses, you're going to have a significant edge. The worse they are compared to you, the greater chance you have of winning -

Monopoly table selection.

I'm not sure where Monopoly and Hold'em actually compare in the luck-to-skill ratio, but this gets us thinking about our game in the right perspective.

Buy it from QTipPoker.com



More Poker Tells in Rounders (Besides KGB's Oreo)

-Zach Elwood

Author Reading Poker Tells

There is a class of verbal statements you hear a lot in poker that I call disclaimers. These are statements that attempt to explain away, or “disclaim”, the real meaning behind an action. A basic example of this would be when a no-limit tournament player goes all in while announcing something like, “I’ve only got a few chips left. I guess I’ll go all-in.” He is implying that him not having many chips left is a primary reason for going all in. If that player is an amateur player, more often than not that player will be strong, and the “disclaimer” will be pointing you in the wrong direction.

Another example would be when two players are heads-up on the flop and the player first to act, as if just noticing that it’s only the two of them, says in a friendly manner, “Just us? I’ll check.” (This is much more common in limit than in no-limit.) This player is implying that he’s checking because there are only two people playing, so he’s probably actually checking because he has a weak hand.

One more real-world example. In the poker show *The Big Game*, there was an episode where the amateur David Fishman made the nuts, a Broadway straight, on the river versus Phil Hellmuth. After Hellmuth bets the river, Fishman feigns uncertainty, saying, “I’m not gonna let you do this to me again, Phil.” Then he pushes all in. Fishman is trying to suggest that he is tired of being pushed around and that is why he is fighting back. This is a very classic example of a disclaimer, and many amateurs do this. If an amateur player makes any kind of excuses for why he’s betting or raising, you should be very wary. Even a lot of experienced players will do subtle variations of this (although experienced players will also be capable of switching these kinds of things up, so it’s best to only trust it from players who you think are predictable.)

In the poker movie *Rounders*, both Teddy KGB and Mike McDermott (Matt Damon’s character) exhibit a few poker tells besides the infamous Malkovich-opening-the-Oreo one. Both of them exhibit a few obvious disclaimers.

In the first scene in *Rounders* between Teddy KGB and Matt Damon (I’ll just call him Matt Damon instead of Mike D.), the match ends with Damon getting A9 on a board of A8993, for a full house, and KGB having AA for the higher full house. This clip is on YouTube so, if you have the chance, watch the clip and see if you notice examples of disclaimers.

Damon raises pre-flop and KGB smooth-calls with his AA, saying “Position raise. I call.” He’s implying that he’s calling because he thinks Damon’s raise is based solely on his dealer button. Actually he’s calling because he’s very strong and his speech is attempting to misdirect Damon’s attention from that idea.

Next, on the river, KGB bets into Damon, and Damon feigns shock, saying “Time” and holding up his hands as if overwhelmed.

Then, a minute later, after his “pondering”, Damon goes all in, saying “Yeah, I’m gonna go all-in, cause I don’t think you got the spades.” This is a disclaimer, stating that Damon is going all-in mainly because he thinks KGB did not make a flush. Not to mention the fact that Damon’s acting of shock at KGB’s bet, and then his subsequent pushing all-in, was a hell of a tell, too.

These are pretty obvious, aren’t they? Let’s put aside the fact that these two are leaking tells like a grade-schooler would and move on to the last scene; the final confrontation between KGB and Damon.

In this hand, Damon raises pre-flop with 89 of spades and KGB calls. The flop comes 67T, giving Damon the nuts. Damon checks, KGB bets \$2,000, and Damon calls, saying “All right, I’ll call the two grand, I’ll gamble.” This is one you hear a lot, although it’s so common to say it, it doesn’t mean much if a decent player says it. Although in this case, considering Damon was the pre-flop raiser, then checked, then gave a disclaimer, it might make you a little wary if you were KGB.

Next, the turn comes a blank. Not really a verbal disclaimer, but Damon sighs, like he’s hurt. This is a good place to point out that disclaimers are just another manifestation of the same type of behavior of players who try to look sad or upset by the cards; they’re all just different ways players try to misdirect your attention away from the truth.

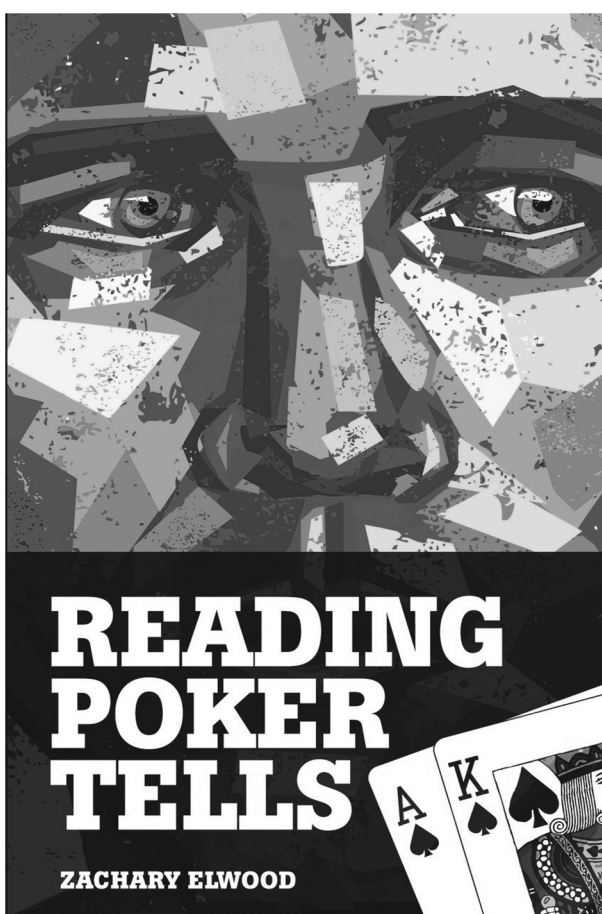
KGB bets the pot, and Damon calls, saying, “Okay, Teddy, I’m gonna call you, or else I won’t respect myself tomorrow morning.” Again, to really beat a dead horse, Damon is implying he’s only calling because he doesn’t want to be run

over by KGB, so we can be pretty sure he’s calling for another reason. Then Damon slowrolls KGB on the river and that’s the end.

I thought at first, when I started studying the first scene, that maybe the movie-makers were having McDermott display this tell purposefully, at the start of the movie, to show that he had grown as a player by the end. That he had gotten rid of his obvious verbal tells. But that wasn’t correct; he was letting out a stream of disclaimers there, too. And of course KGB had one himself with his Aces.

Okay, so KGB and Mikey McDermott seem like total fish. That’s something that’s become increasingly obvious throughout the years the more I’ve played and the more I’ve learned. It’s a process we all go through when it comes to this movie. Young, blind, ignorant love gives way to experience and harsh criticism. I love *Rounders*, but no one can argue it depicts realistic high-stakes poker scenes. (But you could also argue that realistic high-stakes poker scenes would not make a good movie.)

And even though *Rounders* is fiction, I think you can take away some valuable real-life lessons; if you hear a guy trying to give you harmless excuses for why he’s calling or raising, you should be very careful. If you hear a guy use reliable disclaimers in every hand he plays, like Damon does here, I’d say you’re in a very good game.



“Elwood’s Reading Poker Tells is clearly the best book on this aspect of live play.”

-Mason Malmuth
author &
co-owner of TwoPlusTwo Publishing

“It’s hard work to find tells, so many people don’t do it. This book just made it a lot more simple, condensing years of legwork into one easy read.”

-“Limon”
professional poker player

www.ReadingPokerTells.com

I found a great game, where should I sit?

Getting in a great game is half the battle. If you have a choice of seats, you would like:

On your right: very bad players who play too many hands. When the worst players are on your right, you can play more hands when they have entered the pot.

On your left: tighter players who will not give you a hard time. With the tight players on your left, you will play fewer hands out of position and get re-raised less often.

Across the table: the players who give you trouble. This includes the good players and anyone who puts you off your game. You want these guys as far away from you as possible. If they're across the table, they won't be able to harass you. You won't have to play tricky blind vs. blind or button spots against them.

You can't always have everything perfect, so these are listed by priority. *Focus on getting position on the weaker players whenever you can.*

I'm in a tournament and cannot pick my seat. Should I still worry about game selection?

You should think about game selection when you pick which tournaments to play. Find the tournaments which consistently have the weakest fields. It's okay if there are some strong players out there, but you want the average level of competition to be as low as possible. In general, cheaper tournaments will have weaker fields, but there are \$10,000 events like the World Series of Poker that may have shockingly weak players in them.

Even once you're stuck in a seat, you can still apply the core principle of game selection. Instead of picking your table or your seat, you're picking which of your opponents to be involved with more often than others. Notice the weaker players at your table and be a little more liberal in entering pots with them. Avoid the tougher players when you can. Don't fold a great hand just because you may have to play it against a great player, and don't play a terrible hand just because your opponent plays bad. *Make your decisions on marginal hands based on who is likely to be in the pot with you.*

Select my game, pick my seat, choose my opponents. Anything else?

Almost every poker game outside of someone's home will feature an unseen and deadly opponent who never loses. The rake. The dealer (or the software) will remove money from every pot that sees a flop. This means that it's not enough to be slightly better than your opponents unless the rake is extremely low.

Find out what the rake is in your game. The higher the rake, the larger the gap you need between your and your opponents' skills. *Be sure to take advantage of any rake-back, bonus system, free parking, food, or whatever the house offers in exchange for your loyalty.* It all adds up.

WAY OF THE POKER WARRIOR



PAUL CHRISTOPHER HOPPE
www.pokerisaskill.com

And when you find a great game, keep the mood light and your worst opponents entertained. See if you can make them your best friends at the table without being condescending. If they enjoy losing to you, maybe they'll stick around longer or come back next time. Some opponents might even play worse against you because they like you.

Finding a good game is the most important thing you can do to improve your poker results, so when you do find one, do everything you can to keep it good.

The River Minimum Raise

-Ed Miller

www.NotedPokerAuthority.com

The river value min-raise is a play I use with some frequency. I most typically try it when I'm heads-up with position on the river, and I have a hand I was planning to bet for value if checked to. But instead of checking, my opponent bets. And, given the way the hand has played, I think my opponent's range consists of a number of relatively weak made hands that he could be betting for value or making a blocking bet with. Here's an example from a hand I played a few months back:

It's a 5-handed online \$0.50-\$1 game. I have a \$100 stack, and everyone has me covered. I'm first to act and raise to \$3.50 with K :heart: Q :spade: . Only the small blind calls, making a pot of \$8.

The flop is Q :club: 5 :diamond: 3 :spade: . The small blind checks, and I bet \$8. The small blind calls.

The turn is the 8 :heart: . The small blind checks, and I check.

The river is the 4 :spade: . The small blind bets \$10, into the \$24 pot, and I min-raise to \$20.

The small blind calls and shows J :spade: J :heart: . My queens are good.

My opponent is a regular in the game and a tight, aggressive player. After cold-calling preflop in the small blind and check-calling this ragged flop, I thought unimproved pocket pairs would represent a large portion of my opponent's range on the turn. Since he's a tight player, I wouldn't expect him to call with many hands containing a five or a Trey. I also wouldn't expect him to call preflop with hands containing a queen weaker than about Q-J suited. And no flush draws or high straight draws are possible on this flop. Thus, after calling preflop and on the flop, I expect him frequently to hold a pocket pair.

I didn't think I could get him to pay off three streets with a pocket pair smaller than queens (or with most of the rest of his range that I'm ahead of), so I figured I'd check it back on the turn and represent missed big cards like A-J. Then I could go for some value on the river.

This check is not one I would always make with top pair on the turn. In fact, I usually bet the turn when I have a good top pair. I checked because the board is very dry – no flush draws or high straight draws – so I can't get value from (and protect my hand against) those hands.

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The Mark Hoke Show

Tuesdays 9-10pm on KLAV Las Vegas

Sunday, Wednesday, Friday 6-9pm PST

ROGUE-WIRE

Check-raise bluff on draw heavy boards



(bet size tell/too tight)

(Villain's flaw)



(Difficulty rating)

Related Missions: 5, 14, 16, 23



(semi-bluff)

(Hero's exploit)

I often hear people complain that \$1-\$2 is no fold-em hold-em. That is not true. In writing this book, I went back to the \$1-\$2 tables and tried these plays. It is true, people call too much. Realize though, this happens because people bet too small. Get in there with some real bets, and you will get the folds you want.

In this hand, the villain was too nitty and had bet sizing tells that allowed me to make this play.

\$1-\$2 Mohegan Sun	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG+1	Nit	Call	? ?	\$402
Button	Unknown	Call	? ?	\$102
Big Blind	Hero	Check	7 9 ♦ ♦	Covers

We are always happy to get a free flop in the Big Blind.

8 10 K ♠ ♥ ♣	Pot: \$7	Range:	Starting stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/Call	7 9 ♦ ♦	Covers
Nit (UTG+1)	\$10	? ?	\$400
Unknown (Button)	Call	? ?	\$100

We could lead out as a semi-bluff; however, we get more information about the big stack's hand by checking. If the flop checks through, then we will bet out safe in our knowledge that the Nit did not like his hand much. The unknown is less of a concern because he has a smaller stack.

Nit bets. Because of the denominations of the chips, this is not really an overbet. Convenience is at play. People are less sensitive to relative bet sizes in micro-pots like this. He has something – at least top pair. We could consider the semi-bluff raise; however, he has an unlimited hand strength right now. He can show up with a set of tens that he will fold with or with a weak suited king that he will fold. The unknown could have anything. Let us see what develops.

8 10 K 7 ♠ ♥ ♣ ♣	Pot: \$37	Range:	Starting stack:
Hero (Big Blind)	Check/ \$75	7 9 ♦ ♦	Covers
Nit (UTG+1)	\$10/Fold	♦ ♦	\$390
Unknown (Button)	Call/Fold	♦ ♦	\$90

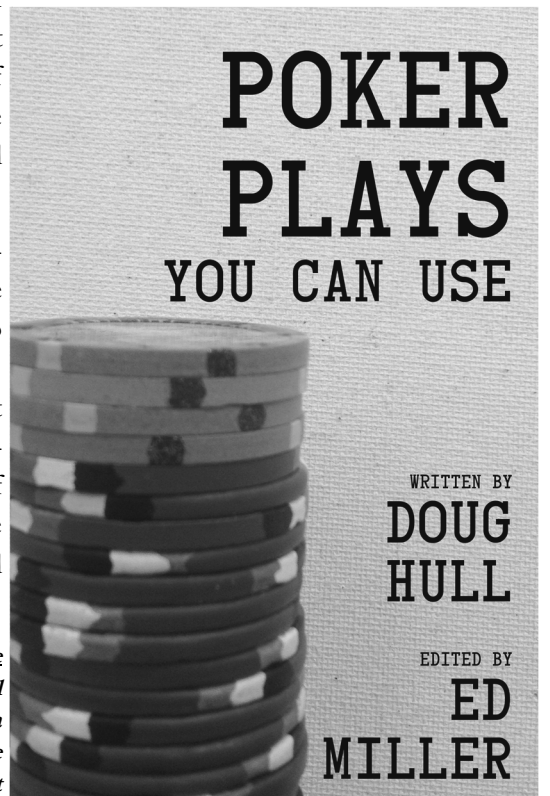
Here was the mistake and limiting bets we were waiting for. This \$10 bet says he likes his hand enough to bet but not enough to commit any real amount of money. The board just got a flush draw and completed a straight draw. The unknown did not like his hand enough to raise either. We have bottom pair and a good open-ended straight draw. Our ten clean outs are helpful here in case we get called. If called by the nit, we might bluff the river. If the unknown calls us, we are going to need a hand.

The Nit asked what I had. I told him, “9J.” Seriously, who check-raises there with anything but the nuts? He never would. What did the Nit have? Who knows, I am guessing a King with a kicker he was not really proud of.

He had a strong range, but with the small bet, he told us how he felt about it. He was at the bottom of his possible holdings. We became the monster he was looking for, and he folded.

What happens if we just passively call that turn bet? 20% of the time we get there and we mostly do not get paid off. We are getting 6:1 on the call, so it works even without implied odds. By taking the aggressive line, we were able to steal all of his equity in the pot and 20% of the time we get there on the river and win an even bigger pot.

Poker Plays You Can Use
by Doug Hull
Chapter continues with a reinforcing example
Available at
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A guide to reading these hand charts

This book is laid out differently than other poker books. A tabular format is used so that all the relevant stack sizes, positions, holdings and table images are easily seen during every street.

\$2-\$5 Foxwoods	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
UTG	LAG	Call/Call	? ?	\$450
Cutoff	Bad regular	Call/Fold	♦ ♦	...
Button	Hero	\$30	K Q ♣ ♠	Covers

In this format, the action of each player is in the action column. If a player makes multiple actions per street, they are separated by slashes. This hand would be written out as follows:

“A Loose Aggressive player limps Under the Gun. It is folded to a bad regular in the cutoff who also limps. Hero raises on the Button and only the LAG calls.”

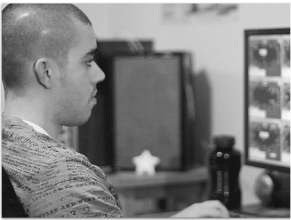
This format is continued on each street in a different table. The starting stacks for each street are updated to make the action clearer.

7 8 Q ♠ ♥ ♣	Pot: \$72	Range:	Stack:
LAG (UTG)	\$50/Fold	♦ ♦	\$420
Hero (Button)	\$200	K Q ♣ ♠	Covers

We can see that on the turn the LAG bet and then folded to our raise.

The other thing you will notice is that each chapter starts with a table showing the Villain's flaw, the difficulty rating of the play we made, and the exploit that we used. The icons are there to make it very fast to flip through the book for the situations you are looking for later.

Playing Against Bad Players



Nathan Williams "BlackRain79"
-author of *Crushing the Microstakes*
www.BlackRain79.com

One of the most common elements of low stakes poker whether live or online is the presence of really bad players. Often they are recreational players just splashing around having a good time with no real interest in studying the game or getting better. But plenty of the time they are regulars who you see day in and day out. They are certainly there to win but their understanding of the game has often not advanced much beyond the old "play tight" strategy. Both of these types of players are often tilt or flip out easily. Furthermore, they don't understand ranges very well or even know what it means at all. They are concerned with their own two cards and not too much else. So how can we best exploit this?

Remember That This is "No Limit" Hold'em

Become creative with your bet sizes. If there is some whale in the game playing nearly every single hand he is probably going to call 3x the blind just as often as 6x or even 10x if he has a hand that he likes (i.e., half the deck). Why not juice up the pot if you have a premium hand like TT, JJ, QQ, KK, AA, AK or AQ? The large majority of the time you will still be ahead on the flop anyways even if you only have ace high. And by artificially pumping up the size of the pot it allows you to get stacks in much more easily by the river. Remember that your whole goal at the poker table should be to get the bad player's money (all of it) before anyone else. If they are willing to call more preflop then make it more preflop. If they are willing to call more postflop then make it more. If you were running a business selling a product for \$50 but nearly all of your customers would be happy to pay \$100 for it you would be crazy to charge the lower amount right? Poker is no different. Get the maximum.

One of the best places to use over-raises is with three-bets because bad players notoriously hate to fold to them. So imagine that you are dealt AA in the big blind. A regular raised it in early position and the table fish called. Instead of three-betting a standard amount such as 4x the original raise why not make it 6x? The recreational player is going to call regardless because he has already called one raise so why not call one more? As long as you don't make it something ludicrous like half a stack, he isn't going to care. But getting those extra couple big blinds in there will make a huge difference for us after the flop in getting his whole stack in, especially if it is deep. The pot gets bigger much faster (exactly what we want when we

have AA) and the recreational player therefore feels "pot committed" much faster as well. Win/win.

Be Annoying!

This is another huge one which allows you to get more action with your creative bets both before and after the flop. I like to be as annoying as possible to the weaker players at the table by raising their limps, three-betting them frequently and continuation betting and barreling them a lot also. You do need to learn to lay off the gas pedal a little bit as they get more frustrated with you but I think you catch my drift. I want their attention focused on me. I do not want to just be another anonymous guy at the table. I want to be the one who they are thinking about. As I said before, often players at these stakes are very weak so all of these "small ball" bets and raises are just setting them up to flip out against me at the wrong time. Poker is a game played between people. You have to understand how powerful the psychology is behind it to maximize your gains. Nobody wants to give action to the quiet nit who just plays his good cards and limps along sometimes preflop. They give action to the guy causing a storm who keeps raising and re-raising and ruining their peaceful poker game. The table "bully" basically. If you want to get lots of action you need to start learning how to give it. But the real beauty is that all of our splashing around is done on the small money streets, preflop and flop primarily. When the big money goes in, we have it.

Nobody wants to give action to the quiet nit who just plays his good cards and limps along sometimes preflop.

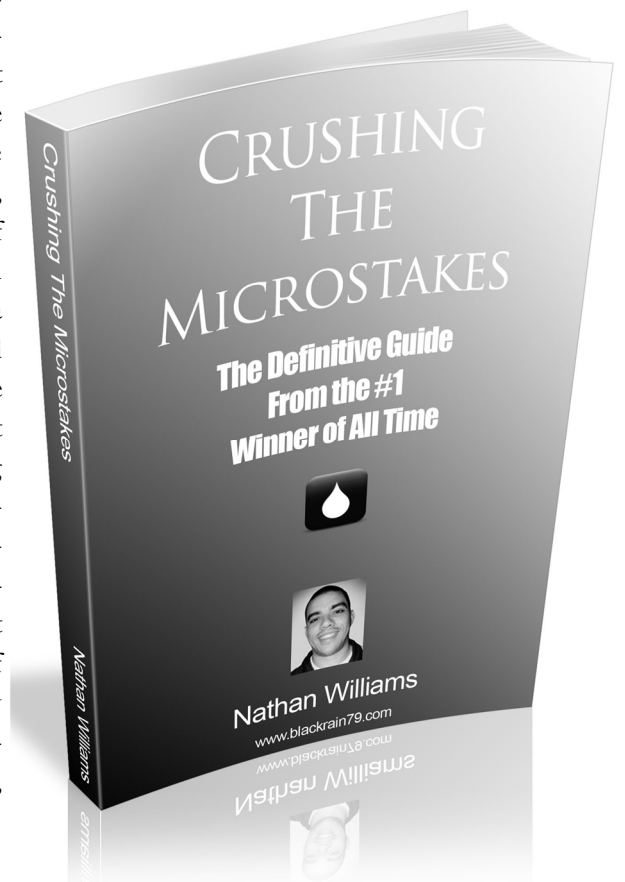
It is important to note that if you are abrasive enough (in the poker sense, you should never be impolite to your opponents) you do not even need the nuts to play for a big pot or stacks. As you wear down the weaker players they will start looking for any opportunity to fight back and will often be willing to get it in much lighter. So for instance, if you have position on the table 's weakest player you should pound on him every time he

limps. I would just do it with any two cards in the beginning because that is when you will get the most credit. Continue raising his limps, betting the flop and taking it down enough times and he will go into fight back mode.

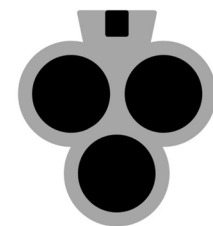
He will start acting out of character. Making random donk bets (leading into the preflop raiser) on multiple streets with draws, very weak made hands or even total bluffs. He will start calling you down lighter as well. These are tell-tale signs of his frustration. At this point I know that I can raise up his limp with a hand as silly as Q7, hit top pair and get multiple streets of value by simply calling his donk bets. There is no point in raising because he is often weak and we want him to just keep tossing in dead money.

Or if he goes into calling station mode I can just continuation bet all three streets and get called by middle

pair the whole way. There is no way that you could get this kind of action without all the buildup before. That is the whole point of all the isolation raises, the three-betting and the continuation betting. You are setting him up for the big score. Get your opponent sufficiently upset with you, especially a weaker player who doesn't handle it well, and they become your ATM.



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And my opponent is tight. If I have him beaten and I bet the turn, he'll probably give me credit for at least top pair and fold. Unfortunately for me, that's what he should do in this situation. I want my opponent to make a mistake, and I think I can trick him into paying me off on the river by feigning weakness on the turn. If the board were more coordinated, allowing for many drawing hand possibilities, or if my opponent were looser and more likely to take a weak pair too far, I likely would have bet the turn.

On the river he bets \$10 into the \$24 pot, and I read that bet size (combined with the action throughout the hand) as a likely thin value or blocking bet with a modest made hand. With a big hand like a set, I would expect him to bet bigger.

Since my hand beats most modest made hands he could have, I want to raise for value. But I don't want to raise so much that he'll fold. That's why I like the river min-raise. It squeezes extra value out of a player with a weak hand without putting too much at risk on the off chance that he has me beaten. I thought he would likely call with many of the hands he would bet, and I thought a reraise bluff was extremely unlikely (so I intended to fold to a reraise).

I use this min-raise play against likely blocking bets relatively frequently, and overall it's quite successful.

I sometimes min-raise the river against larger bet sizes also, and in that situation I'll do it for value occasionally but also frequently as a bluff. When someone bets the pot on the river and they're out of position, it tends to polarize their range. Either they have a really strong hand, or they're bluffing. How polarized the range is depends on the player and the pot size (in smaller pots people will tend to bet the pot with weaker hands). But frequently players will make large river bets with hand ranges that contain a high percentage of bluffs.

If the hand has gone down in such a way that I think my opponent is a pretty good favorite to have a bluff (because the range isn't balanced correctly) then I'll some-

times min-raise a pot-sized bet. Usually it doesn't make sense to raise more than the minimum because either the opponent has a big hand and will call a raise of any size, or it's a bluff and a min-raise will get the job done. Though, by the same token, if I'm legitimately raising for value then I'll tend to shove all-in in these situations because I now want to get called for as much money as possible.

(Obviously this strategy is exploitable by a player who can figure out that I'm bluffing when I'm min-raising and not when I'm shoving, but few of my opponents know my play well enough to catch on and exploit me in the heat of the moment. And I do min-raise the river for value, even against bigger bets, so my opponent would really have to be in my head to decode my bet size correctly. Even so, against better players I don't take full advantage of exploitative bet sizing to avoid leaking too much information.)

Min-raising the river can be a powerful play, and I hope I've given you some food for thought so that next time your opponent throws out a blocking bet, you'll squeeze out just a little more value.

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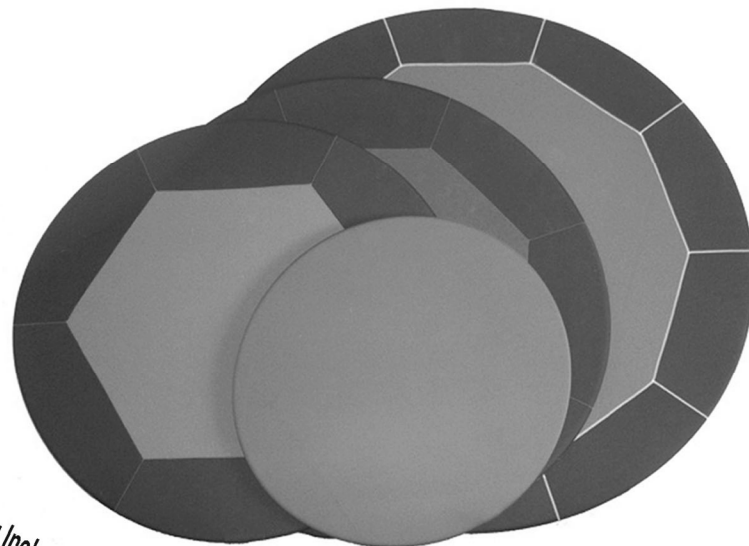


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