Doyle Brunson's Super System

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Chapter One:
General Poker Strategy - Introduction

Poker is a game of people. That's the most important lesson you should learn from my book.

I'll be teaching you guidelines and concepts you'll be able to use with great success, and you'll quickly become a very good player. But, if your ambition is to become a great player, a top flight Pro, a superstar ... you'll need to really understand your opponents. You'll need to get inside your opponent's head and be able to estimate with a high degree of certainty what his check, bet or raise really means ... and what hand he's likely to be playing.

Being able to do that accurately isn't easy. But you can do it if you're alert, observant, disciplined and if you concentrate whenever you play (whether or not you're involved in the pot). Using my advice and the advice of my expert collaborators, you'll find that the "task" of unmasking your Poker faced opponents will become easier and easier.

When you're able to put your opponent on exactly the hand he's playing (because you know him almost as well as he knows himself) you can select the best strategy possible for that particular Poker situation. When you reach that level of skill, you'll be a complete player.

That's what Poker's all about. People...and the strategy you use against them. More than any other game, Poker depends on your understanding your opponent. You've got to know what makes him tick. More importantly, you've got to know what makes him tick at the moment you're involved in a pot with him. What's his mood ... his feeling? What's his apparent psychological frame of mind right now? Is he in the Mood to gamble ... or is he just sitting there waiting for the nuts? Is he a loser and on tilt (playing far below his normal capability) ... or has he screwed down (despite his being loser) and begun playing his best possible game? Is he a cocky winner who's now playing carelessly and throwing off most of his winnings...or is he a winner who's started to play very tight so he can protect his gains?

When you can accurately answer questions like those (and there are many more like them) ... and employ the other ideas, principles, rules, techniques and strategies I'll teach you in this book you'll be one super tough Poker player.

Put all of it together and your playing ability will border on being World Class.

It takes a lot to play winning Poker at a World Class level because Poker is such a complex game more complex than any other game ... or any other form of gambling.

For example, the difference between playing good Poker and playing good Blackjack is as vast as the difference between squad tactics and grand strategy in warfare. You can beat a Blackjack game by knowing exactly what to do in every situation...and doing it. That's tactics. But in Poker you may face an identical situation twice against the same opponent, handle it two different ways, and be right both times. That's strategy.

And that's why there's never going to be a computer that will play World Class Poker. It's a people game.

A computer could be programmed to handle the extensive mathematics of a Poker game. But the psychological complexities are another matter. A system figured out by computer can beat Blackjack because there the dealer has no options. He has to stand on 17, he has to hit 16.

A computer could play fair to middling Poker. But no computer could ever stand face to face with a table full of people it had never met before, and make quality, high profit decisions based on psychology.

To do that requires perception and judgement. It requires a human mind.

The way I accumulate knowledge of a particular player is by listening to him, and looking at him, instead of talking.

PAY ATTENTION...and it will pay you

Concentrate on everything when you're playing. Watch and listen ... remember you have to do both, and relate the two. You listen to what your opponent says, but you watch what he's doing independently of what he says because a lot of players talk loose and play tight, and a little later they'll reverse it on you. So you look at a man every time he's involved in a hand. You judge him every time. That's the way you get to know him and his moves.

If you aren't learning what you want to know just by watching and listening, create your own opportunity. Try to bluff at him the first good opportunity, and see if he'll call you or not what kind of hand he'll call with, and what kind he'll throw away. Of course, anybody with a lick of sense is trying to keep you from reading him. But you can still figure him because it is very, very difficult for any man to conceal his character.

A man's true feelings come out in a Poker game

You'll see smart lawyers playing Poker and giggling and carrying on like school kids. And a man's hostilities can boil over after a while, too.

Watch a ballgame with a man when he's betting a lot of money on it. You'll learn what kind of temperament he's got, how well he can take disappointment. That's the way it is with Poker.

If you wanted to use Poker just for a test of character, solely to learn about the men you'll have to deal with away from the Poker table, it would be a telling test. As a matter of fact, isn't that what a lot of Friday night Poker games between business acquaintances are really all about? Size them up at the Friday night Poker sessions ... and then take advantage of them during the next business week.

This brings us to another subtlety of Poker: Not everybody you're going to play against thinks the way you do. Almost everybody wants to win, but they expect to win in different ways.

PLAY AGGRESSIVELY, it's the winning way

There's a very well known Poker player, a man who enters the *World Series of Poker* every year, who has a talent for figuring out exactly what your hand is. But when he decides that you're holding a Pair of Jacks (in Hold 'em) and his own hand will not beat the Jacks, he'll try to make you throw your hand away.

To me, that's not being aggressive ... that's being stupid. It works sometimes, but should you jeopardize your money when you think your opponent's got a good hand? Let him win the pot and wait till you think he doesn't have much of anything. That's when you can try to bluff him out of the pot. Or wait until you think you have him beat.

Everybody in Poker thinks he knows what a *tight* player is, but I'm going to define it again because so many people confuse the term "tight" with "solid".

"Tight" means conservative. A tight player is a player that is tight pretty much all the time.

But a "solid" player is a player who's tight about entering a pot in the first place ... but after he enters the pot he becomes aggressive.

Most good players, by the way, are solid.

The opposite of the tight player, as you would imagine from the name, is the loose player. He'll play most of the pots. Often he'll be drunk. You need patience to play him, and you require a good hand to bet because he'll call you with extremely weak hands.

The perfect opponent to face is the *Calling Station*. He's similar to a loose drunk player, but he rarely bets. Most of the time, he just checks and calls. And **if you cant beat a man who always checks to you ... you can't beat anyone.**

Timid players don't win in high stakes Poker.

As you'll learn, I don't fit into any of the classic categories. I have the reputation of being a very aggressive player with a definite tendency to be on the loose side. But, despite my aggressiveness and looseness, I exercise a considerable amount of judgement whenever I play

Chapter One:
General Poker Strategy - Tells

TELLS - look for them...and you'll find them

Once you've pegged a player's basic style, don't make the mistake of assuming he's going to play that same way every day of his life. Sometimes a player makes a conscious effort to change his manner of play. More often, however, his current mood affects his play.

Some days people have more of a playing spirit than on other days. If a man doesn't feel like playing, and has become involved in a game anyway, he'll throw his hand away very easily. He can be bluffed.

But if you see another guy sitting there chewing gum, and bouncing his leg up and down, you know he's anxious to get into action. He came to play. You have to handle him with caution. It's not safe to bluff him, at least not to start with.

Almost all players have Tells ... those giveaway moves that are almost as revealing, to a rival who has spotted them, as actually showing him your hand.

The most common Tell is the pulse in a man's neck. On a lot of people, the pulse in the neck is visible. If so, a man can't hide it, since nobody can control their heartbeat in stress situations. When you see a man's neck just throbbing away, you know he's excited, and usually he's excited because he is bluffing.

You may have heard someone ask another player: "How deep are you?" That question is sometimes an attempt to establish a Tell. (The question means: How much money do you have in front of you?) It's worth knowing. I don't think a player should be obligated to tell you, even though I have heard it argued both ways.

Questions like that are worth asking for psychological reasons. When a man's under pressure, his voice may break, and then you know something about his current attitude.

When I'm playing in a big pot, I won't let anyone involve me in conversation.

Even real Pros are susceptible. Once I had a Tell on Puggy Pearson. Every time he put his chips in the rack and bet them, he was bluffing. He must have been doing that six months before somebody else discovered it and told him.

Another time, Amarillo Slim Preston pointed out to me that I was counting my chips off and betting them when I had a hand, and when I was bluffing I would just push them in without counting. That's the only Tell anyone had on me that I know about, but I'm sure there have been others.

All top Professionals have a defense against people using Tells against them. Sometimes when I'm bluffing I say some particular thing, like "gee whiz", so that people will connect that with bluff.

But the next time I say "gee whiz", I won't be bluffing.

With a great deal of experience, you may learn not only whether a man is bluffing or has a quality hand, but the actual cards he holds. This is what people mean when they say a particular player can "put a man on a hand". My natural ability along these lines has contributed a lot to my success.

I remember playing in a game where you could almost tell what Jimmy Cassella had by the amount he would raise. That's the only thing you had to know. With an A 10 in Hold 'em, he'd raise about $100; with an A J, he'd raise $125, and so forth.

Other players have patterns that, while less pronounced, are definitely visible to a Poker Professional. You take into account the way they are sitting, their previous playing habits, how they bet, and often even the tone of their voices. It's the totality of everything about them rather than any one particular thing.

Chapter One:
General Poker Strategy - ESP

ESP - it's a Jellyroll

This book will deal scientifically with Tells and with psychology, but sometimes you don't even know how you know ... only that you're sure of what your opponent has.

I believe some good Poker players actually employ a degree of extrasensory perception (ESP). While I've never studied the subject in depth, it seems to me there's too much evidence to ignore that ESP exists or that most people have it to some degree. Everybody has had the experience of riding with someone else in an automobile and thinking of a song, then being surprised to hear his companion start singing that very song.

You can't imagine how often I've called a player's exact hand to myself and been proven right. There's even a plausible, though completely unproven, explanation how a person could know what cards another player is holding. The brain's functions involve electrical impulses. In this electronic age we're becoming more familiar every day with Appliances which broadcast, purely as an unintentional by product, energy impulses which are picked up on dissimilar appliances at considerable distances.

Is it really too unreasonable to suspect that such a highly sophisticated electrical device as the human brain, during the intensity of concentration in a big pot, could broadcast a simple message like a "pair of Jacks" a mere eight feet?

I hope I live to see that question answered, and not merely asked. I like to think of ESP as a Jellyroll anyway.

In the meantime, use all the sophisticated techniques and strategies presented in this book in determining whether or not to call, bet or raise. But in the rare situations when all your card knowledge and best judgement leave you in doubt, go with your strong feeling ... and not against it.

Chapter One:
General Poker Strategy - Superstitions

Superstitions - There Are Bigger Faults

I don't believe in the traditional superstitions, but there are a couple that I still honor. Like most Poker players, I don't like to be paid in $50 bills. But there's also a reason for that. It's easy to mistake a $50 bill for a $5 bill.

And I don't eat peanuts at a card table. There's no reason in the world eating peanuts should affect the outcome of the game, but it doesn't cost me anything to observe the taboo against it, so I observe it. That's a jellyroll, too. And ... there are bigger faults a player can have.

When I lose a pot, I sometimes get up and walk around the chair. Some Poker players do that to change their luck. I do it just to cool off.

Nor do I like to see women at a Poker table. That's not superstition, either. I was brought up to respect women, and I just don't feel comfortable in high stakes warfare against women.

I've never met a woman who was a really top player. Maybe that's because there aren't a lot of women players. I have, however, seen some who were pretty good, even by Professional standards.

I doubt that any of my children will decide to play professionally. It can be a very good life, and it has been for me, but my children haven't come from the background that produces good Poker players. You try to make life a little easier for your kids than it was for you (and rightfully so), but the other side of that coin is that they're not forced to be so competitive when they're young, and are unlikely to develop the instinct it takes to be a good player.

Chapter One:
General Poker Strategy - Honor

Honor - A Gambler's Ace in the Hole

It is good insurance to have the reputation and respect that make it possible for you to borrow money, but borrowing is to be avoided. The first time I came to Las Vegas, I lost my entire bankroll of $70,000, and I got up from the Poker table and didn't ask anyone for anything. And the men who were at that Poker table will always respect me for that, even though I have loaned money to some of them, and they to me, since.

I was completely broke when I got home to Fort Worth. I got a $20 bill somewhere, and started grinding it out playing two cent Auction Bridge. When I built up a little bankroll, I moved into richer company, and eventually returned to Vegas.

Don't borrow from anyone you don't want to loan money to.

I could've made a faster comeback by borrowing money, but you have to be careful whom you borrow from in the gambling business. And if you make up your mind to use the credit you have, you may not manage your money so well, or the money you borrow.

When you've mismanaged somebody's money, it is hard to compete against him. It's hard even to play in the same game.

Make it a practice never to be staked, never to borrow money if you can help it. And if you can't help borrowing, borrow the minimum, and pay it back on the exact day you promise...or sooner.

You must maintain a reputation for honor in the gambling business. Your word must be your bond. It'll be your Ace in the hole.

Chapter One:
General Poker Strategy - Being Competitive

Be As Competitive As You Can Be

Few people realize how intensely competitive you must be to become a good Poker player. I couldn't play Poker just for fun, and I don't think many of the top Professionals could. I've always played to win, and whenever I could discover any bad habits, I've tried to eliminate them just as I would try to eliminate mistakes in a business I might be running.

Use your best game against anybody you play. Many of the top Pros are close friends, but they almost never give each other a break in a game. Sailor Roberts, for instance, is one of the best friends I've ever had. He helped pick me up when I was young and unknown and broke. But when I play cards with Sailor, I do my level best to cut his throat and he tries to cut mine. It's been like that from the time we met. In fact, the first time we played he broke me.

In the trade, this characteristic is called Alligator Blood, and it is highly valued and respected. It means you'll do anything within the rules to win. You try to have special moves, such as making a slow, hesitant call in place of a fast call, when a man might bet at you again (after the next card is turned up in Hold 'em). You might set a trap for him by leading him to believe you're betting a hand which is a slight favorite, when you actually have a hand that's practically unbeatable.

I go into a Poker game with the idea of completely destroying it.

Changing gears is one of the most important parts of playing Poker. It means shifting from loose to tight play and vice versa. Don't do it gradually...it works better to switch suddenly. Once they catch on, change gears again.

If you're playing with a lineup of people who have played you before, do this even more often. When you really think they know you, change gears several times in one game.

In a No Limit game, the gear to stay in most of the time is the one that most people at the table are not using. In other words:

Play *mostly* tight in a loose game, and *mostly* loose in a tight game.

I also vary my play according to how I'm going. If I am losing badly, I play tighter. If I'm winning, I try to play looser. Players are more apt to be intimidated by me when I'm winning.

When I'm playing a No Limit game like *Hold 'em* or *Deuce to Seven Lowball*, if I win a pot, I nearly always play the next pot as well, within reason. Although the cards will break even in the long run, card *rushes* do happen. A card rush means more than that you're winning a lot of pots. It also means that you have temporary command of the game. Your momentum is clear to all the players. On occasions like this you're going to make correct decisions and your opponents may make errors because they are psychologically affected by your *rush*. Make the most of these opportunities and give yourself the chance to enjoy them to the fullest.

Art and Science: Playing Great Poker Takes Both

Poker is more art than science, and that's what makes it so difficult to master. **Knowing what** to do the science is about 10% of the game. Knowing how to do it the art is the other 90%. You not only have to know when to bet, when to raise, and when to fold...you also have to be able to do those things with a certain finesse.

But one has to start with the basics. There are certain things about probabilities that you absolutely must know.

The first is that the cards break even. If you turn over 13 cards from a deck, then reshuffle, and do this again and again, the Ac will show up just as many times (one out of four) if I'm shuffling them or if you're shuffling them yourself.

Over a long period of time, the worst player in the world is going to catch just as many good cards as the best player in the world.

We'll have the same cards to play, but I'll beat him sooner or later because I'm a better player.

That's universally true. It applies to all forms of Poker.

But...as you'll soon discover...there are certain games that involve a lot more skill than others. You have to know what to do with your cards in all types of Poker, but the relative importance of that knowledge varies with the kind of Poker you're playing.

Chapter One:
General Poker Strategy - Important Tips

Another thing you should understand is that Poker is set up in a fashion that is not entirely logical. A Royal Flush is the highest hand. But it's just as hard to be dealt exactly Jd 9c 6s 4h 2d as Ah Kh Qh Jh 10h, but the first hand is worthless. A Flush is better than a Straight because it's harder to make than a Straight.

But the ranking of the cards themselves is arbitrary. There's no real reason a King should be worth more than a Deuce. (And that's a very good justification for playing high cards, particularly in games where winning hands often consist of a mere Pair. It's just as easy to make a Pair of Kings as it is to make a Pair of Deuces ... but the Kings will get the money.)

In any Poker game you're in ... remember that it takes a stronger hand to call a raise than it takes to raise it yourself.

Also, remember that in Limit Poker, you must show down the best hand most of the time to win. In No Limit, on the other hand, you more often than not take a pot without ever showing your hand.
If you've never had the opportunity to see a real No Limit game, you'd be very surprised how much bluffing there is. Good No Limit players bluff four or five times as often as good players in Limit games.

You have to pick your players to bluff. **You can hardly bluff a Sucker at all, whereas any good player can be bluffed**. But always bear in mind the player's mood that particular day ... if he's anxious to play, you handle him more cautiously than you would otherwise.

Bluffing is the main reason I believe No Limit Poker requires more skill thin Limit. Bluffing in No Limit requires real strategy, and the ability to size up your opponents every time you sit down to play.

Yet, paradoxically, Poker becomes easier the higher the stakes of the game, at least in games where Professionals are involved.

Down in the low Limit games, the Professionals who are involved don't have much money, and what they do have they're trying to keep for a stake and to live on. So they're playing the best Poker they know how to play.

But tip in the high stakes games you encounter big businessmen, bookies, hotel owners, millionaires...and they're playing for entertainment. And they are not playing hard.

Chapter One:
General Poker Strategy - Money Management

I've never been as conservative about money management as most successful people are. I don't think your bankroll is the only factor you should consider in deciding whether or not to play in a high limit game.

If the game cries out to be played, in if it's a good game, you feel good, and if you aren't tired, you should try that game even if it is higher than you normally would play. And you should stay in it until the game becomes bad or you grow tired.

Of course, you make that decision within reason. Any time you extend your bankroll so far that if you lost, it would really distress you, you probably will lose. It's tough to play your best under that much pressure.

I prefer using judgement on individual games rather than hard rules, but if you want such a rule, I would suggest you not play $10 limit until you have at least a $1000 bankroll (not the buy in).

In No Limit, you'll usually want a bigger bankroll for a game of the same general size. In a No Limit game with two Blinds of $5 and $10, I'd say you need at least $2,500.

To play No Limit $5, $10, $25 and $50 (Four Blinds), you'd need about $10,000.

It's been a long time since I was broke, but the way I always got broke was by playing with desperation money. I let myself get into too much of a hurry, and played in games I didn't have the bankroll for.

If you have a limited bankroll, be very certain to get the maximum amount of gamble you can for your money. That's an important factor to consider in picking your games. If you have only a Small amount of money to invest in a game, and if you have a wide choice of games (like you do in Las Vegas), you may be better off playing a small No Limit game than a high Limit game. If you have $10,000 you can afford to lose in one game, you might be better off risking it in a No Limit game, simply because if you do get lucky, you can win real big and your bankroll might get healthy fast.

When I buy into a No Limit game, I want to have as many checks in front of me as anybody else at the table, or more. I'm not afraid, and you shouldn't be afraid, of getting drawn out on a hand and going through the whole stack. All your efforts in Poker are directed toward getting in a position to bet the maximum amount you can on the hands that are worth it. When those

opportunities do occur, you don't want to be limited in the amount of action you can accept.

Always play for Chips, rather than cash.

Chips are easier to win. A $5 chip is the same size as a $500 chip it's just not the same color. If you bet a man $20,000 in $500 chips, that's only forty chips, two stacks. But if you bet him $20,000 in $100 bills, it would be a big pile of money, and would tend to freeze him up.

The way to get a person to convert to chips is to point out to him that it takes too long to count out the bills. It's the truth, and a legitimate reason to change to chips, though not really the reason you're doing it.

It's also to your own advantage to think of chips as units, and not as money. You may consider your money status before the game and after the game, but while the game is in progress it is only a game, and the chips are just units. You're trying to win as many units as you can.

This concept is not really unique to Poker, when you think about it. All good businessmen realize that they have to have different standards of what constitutes extravagance in business, and what constitutes extravagance in their lives outside of business. And the standard they set for business is often more liberal. They realize that the house, or the car they buy for their private use has to be paid for out of profits, rather than out of operating capital.

So when they need a new piece of equipment to make a few more dollars of profit, or just to maintain their competitive edge, Poker Professionals don't say to themselves: "I could buy a new house with this money what am I doing risking it in a Poker game?" They realize that it's operating capital, and not profit, and therefore not really available to buy that new house or car, anyway.

All I'm telling you to do is apply the same sound principles to the business of playing Poker and that reminds me of a story.

LOWBALL PETE
***and his* friend SHORTY**

This guy named Lowball Pete went over to his friend Shorty's house and Pete said to Shorty: "I've got to have some money, the baby don't have any food, the rent's due and they're going to throw me out of my house." So Shorty, who was a good friend of Pete's said "well I understand, here's $100." Pete said "thanks Shorty, I'll pay you back as soon as I can." Shorty said: "well, I know that. Where are you going now?" And Pete said "I'm going over to Al's house, they have a $200 limit Lowball game going right now." Shorty said:

"well what difference does that make, how are you going to play?" And Pete said "Oh...I've got money for THAT."

The factor that really determines what kind of game it's going to be is not the limit itself, but the size of the ante in relation to the limit. If you're playing $10 limit and anteing a dollar, you'll have to play more liberally than if the ante is only a quarter.

This is very **important information** because it's something you can ascertain before you ever sit down and risk any of your money.

That information, and all the other pre game data you can collect (such as the kind of players your opponents are) should be weighed against the following consideration: How much do you stand to win in this game? Suppose the ante is so high, and the players are such that you'll have to involve $8,000 or $9,000 of your own money to win, but the players have only about $30,000 among them on the table, and you know that they probably won't bring any more money into the game if they lose that. It's pretty hard to get more than about half the money in a game, so $15,000 would be a big win.

To go into that game you'd be risking $8,000 or $9,000 to win a maximum of $15,000, even if you got the best hands of your life and played them jam up. That's probably too much risk for that much money, since there's usually a better game down the street.

I can remember losing $98,000 in a game that didn't warrant losing $10,000. I could have only won $30,000 or $40,000 ... and to do that, I'd have had to break everybody there.

So this advice amounts to telling you to do as I say, and not as I do. I believe a person should try to learn from watching another man's mistakes. It's so much cheaper than learning from his own.

You have to set a stricter limit on your losses if you're playing Limit Poker than if you're playing No Limit, because it's harder to win money back in a game where the size of the pot's limited.

In a Limit game, if you find yourself losing consistently over a significant period of time and you feel that the cards have been breaking close to even the game may be too tough for you. Walk away from it, and don't come back until something has changed to make you more of a favorite - like the absence of a few very good players who were there before, or the feeling that you have improved your own play.

Chapter One:
Courage and Other Important Qualities

Courage: The Heart of the Matter

I'm asking you to walk a very thin line between wisdom and courage, and keep a tight rein on both. The line gets thinner the more you excel at Poker.

The reason it's so narrow a line is that courage is one of the outstanding characteristics of a really top player. It's important because some people completely break down when they lose a big pot, and they play very badly after that. Whereas other men play just that much harder.

If I could give you a single player to take as a shining example of true courage, it would be Puggy Pearson. Puggy at his best is really, really good, but he has suffered long losing streaks. Yet even during such dismal streaks, his play doesn't rise and fall with the way he's doing in a particular game. He just keeps trying. Nothing stops him.

One of the elements in a player's courage is the realization that money you have already bet is no longer yours regardless of how much is involved. You no longer own any money you've already put in the pot. It belongs to the pot. Your decision must be based on the current situation. If you feel that large bet is now necessary to win the pot, then that's what you should do. If you think that there's no way for you to win the pot, then you have to give it up even if you've already committed a large amount of money. It's a cliché, but true anyway, *don't throw good money after bad*.

Another element which demands courage and judgement is dealing with *implied odds*. It's a concept you'll be dealing with in other sections of this book. It means you have to weigh your bet against not only the present size of the pot, but the anticipated size of the pot when all psychological and mathematical factors are evaluated. It takes a lot of courage to risk your money against a profit you can't see. And it takes courage to move all in with a bluff when you suspect an opponent is weak, They say courage is invisible, but I never knew a top player who didn't have it written all over his face - clear as day.

The important Twins of Poker -
PATIENCE and STAYING POWER

Come to the table with enough time to stay and play awhile. While sitting down and trying to destroy a game by firing from the start is my favorite strategy, it doesn't always work. There are games that demand staying power.

Limit games take lots of patience because the best hands are usually shown down that means it's harder to bluff successfully. So you have to wait for the best hand, and you have to recognize the best hand when you get it.

Or suppose you sit down at a game that includes two drunks who are calling every bet. It will be impossible to simply take charge of that game, so you'll have to wait until you get hands that will beat them.

OTHER IMPORTANT QUALITIES FOR SUCCESS:

Alertness

Whenever you're in a game...you have to stay alert the whole time concentrate during the entire session. And it can be a very long time indeed.

The ability to stay alert for long sessions can be a major factor contributing to your earning power, and it has been a key to my own success. Once, when I was in my middle twenties, I played five days and five nights without any breaks except to go to the bathroom or to eat meals which were brought in. I never left the table for more than five minutes.

I wouldn't do it again, and I wouldn't recommend anyone else do it. I never again had the stamina I did before that session. But it demonstrates how long it's humanly possible to stay awake and alert when you have the resolve and the courage.
Today, at the age of 44, I suspect I could and would play three days in a game where I could make a great deal of money. But I don't like to play that long now, not only because it's gruelling and not particularly healthy, but because it's bad policy to play anything but the best you can. (And that's simply not possible much beyond the first day.)

I can play at my best for about 36 hours now, but after that the drop off becomes noticeable to me, if not to my opponents. The reason I have more staying power than other players is just discipline.

Discipline

I don't drink much, and neither do most good Poker players.

And, I NEVER drink when I play. No top player drinks while playing.
Nor do we let our minds dwell on personal problems when we're playing.

You should make a conscious and constant effort to discover any *leaks* in your play and...then eliminate them. If you discover you're playing too many pots...tighten up. Other times you may need to play more pots.

One form of discipline is to learn to play all Poker games, profitably...even those you don't like. Keep yourself alert and conditioned by playing some of the games you're not best at. Besides...it'll enable you to give the other guy a little action at his game if he wants it.

Try to keep a mental record of the kinds of games in which you do well, as opposed to those in which you don't. (I know, for example, that Limit *Ace to Five* is my worst game, because I've won the least money at it.)

Constant self discipline will pay off in those long. drawn out sessions because any bad habits you have will become exaggerated as you grow tired. The fewer bad habits you have, the less risky it is to play longer sessions.

Discipline will also help your general confidence after three or four losing sessions. If I lose a few times, I will re examine my game and ask, "Am I playing bad?" Sometimes I'll ask somebody else's opinion as well. If the answer is "No, you're not playing badly, you're just playing unlucky", I can believe the answer because I know I've done everything I could to keep my game at its best. So my confidence is unshaken. I can continue to play the way I know I should.

Maintaining confidence is your strongest defense against "going bad". When you start to go bad, or just start to think you're going bad, you become hesitant. And that oft quoted rule that your first instinct is the right one is more true in Poker than in any other game. When you act hesitantly, you often go against your first (and best) judgement.

Allowing your confidence to be shaken can turn a simple losing streak into a terrible case of going bad.
At the same time, you still have to remain open to the idea that you may need to shape up your play. You know about how often you can expect to lose, just on the basis of luck, and if you have a streak of many straight losses, you must admit (to yourself) that something might be wrong. If so, try to correct it.

For instance, if I lost five straight sessions at one of my better forms of Poker. I'd suspect something basic was wrong. If I lost ten straight, there would be **no doubt whatever** that I was doing something wrong, and that luck was not the main thing.

You may also be fortunate enough to have the unforgettable experience of *going good*. But that's no more a matter of luck than *going bad*. There are reasons for it.

Controlling Your Emotions

Romantic problems have the biggest effects, of course. I have seen very good, solid players (even by Professional standards) thrown into second childhood by their wives or girl friends. Emotional entanglements affect their **judgement** at everything. And, at the Poker table, of course, it costs them money.

They divert their interest to their love affairs. They don't concentrate. They have trouble sitting and they want to get up and walk around. Poker doesn't really interest them.

I'm sure that any kind of trauma involving my wife or children would affect me much the same way. But, I **wouldn't** be playing at such a time.

It's hard to give anybody advice about this, but I believe that if something happens that is so upsetting that it really affects your ability to play, you should consider quitting entirely at least for a time, until you regain your emotional balance.

I've been fortunate enough not to go through any traumas of that sort, but it seems to me that taking a long break because of a big problem is a logical extension of the proven practice of taking a short break because of a little problem. So, you'll be doing yourself a service, if you follow this rule:

Never play when you're upset

It's not my disposition to get upset very easily, but I have saved a great deal of money over the years by quitting whenever I have lost enough money to bother me, And that is an even more important principle in Limit Poker than in No Limit...because it takes you so much longer to grind it out at Limit.

About once every three or four months something will happen (like a fight at home, or an argument with a friend) that will get me upset. On those days I go see a movie or play golf. I'll pass a game up on those days, regardless of how good it is, because I know I'll probably lose if I play.

Chapter One: Vacations

Actually SCHEDULE VACATIONS

And if you're playing Professionally, remember to take some vacations. You've got to give your mind a rest.

Once, my friend Jack Straus had come by a game just to watch me play, and he told me "Doyle, you're playing terrible."

I had been under the impression I was playing pretty well, but I hadn't been winning as often as usual. Jack pointed out to me that I had been playing almost every day for a year.

So I went to Hawaii for two weeks, and when I came back I not only played better, but **dramatically better**, than I had before leaving.

Looking back, it's worth noting that even though I do a lot more self examining than most Poker players, I had failed to recognize how badly my game was Off, and why it was off, until jack pointed it out to me.

Because it's so difficult to recognize when you're going stale, I think it's best to take some vacations even when you think you don't need them. Schedule them.

There's such a great difference in the makeup of people that I can't tell you how often you should go. But it seems to me that it would be better to err on the side of too many vacations than too few. They don't have to be lengthy. But there should be three or four days in which you're having fun and not thinking about Poker at all. Hunt, fish, or just lie on the beach you'll be a better player afterward.

The occasional break makes it easier to get a perspective on how you're doing, and what your abilities are. That's very important.

Sure, you want to study the emotional makeup of your opponents. But of all the players at the Poker table, the one whose capabilities and limitations are going to affect you most, is the one sitting in your chair.

Chapter One:
Being Versatile

BE VERSATILE

Having recognized those capabilities and limitations, it's best to test them occasionally, not only to see if your assessments are still valid, but also to maintain a reputation of being willing to give action.

I know very well that I play any kind of No Limit Poker better than almost any kind of Limit Poker. And I know that Hold 'em is my best game, and Ace to Five my worst.

But that doesn't mean I won't play anything but No Limit Hold 'em. I've seen too many players who won't play unless everything is in their favor won't play unless the game is right, won't play unless it's their game, and then won't bet unless they have the nuts.

I reject their philosophy for what I consider the best of reasons ... **none of those players has any real money**. If you get a reputation for playing only when you have the best of it, you'll get very few people to play against you.

So I end up playing a lot of games in which I'm not a big favorite, just to stimulate action, and keep Poker going.

Even if you lose money by doing that, at least you have put it back into the Poker economy of which you are a part, which isn't the case if you blow it in the casino on Craps or spend it on a trip to Europe or anything else.

By playing the other man's game, you may get him to agree to play yours in return. By participating in the game of the day, you make it hard for others to shut you out with a game you don't play. (If you're an all around player, you do play his game.) Once they've decided that you'll play whatever the game is, most players will go back to lobbying for the game at which they think they're the best. That may well be your own strongest game.

By playing games like High Low Split, Razz, Seven Card Stud, and Draw Poker, I may get a weaker player to face me, because I don't have a great reputation at those games.

Finally, by playing those games I maintain a reputation as a man who will bet on something at which he has no real advantage. A reputation for giving action.

Don't worry that you might get a reputation for being a Sucker if you follow this advice. That's the best thing that could possibly happen to you. (To have the reputation of being a Sucker, with everybody in the world throwing their money at me trying to win mine, would be my idea of earthly paradise!)

YOUR REPUTATION can be a two edged sword

The opposite kind of reputation is, of course, a two edged sword. It cuts both ways. After winning the World Hold 'em Championship two years in a row, it is understandably hard for me to get a lot of high Hold 'em action

Ideally, you want a reputation (particularly in Hold 'em) that will make other players just a little afraid of you. Not so afraid they won't play... but afraid enough to respect you.

There isn't really any good way of establishing your credentials as a top Poker player except to get to the top and stay there.

Playing head up against another good player, for instance, is not a realistic test of who's the best player because it happens that some people who are very good at head up play are not very good in a Ring game ... and vice versa.

The perfect test would probably be to have the same line up (set of players), playing against each other five nights a week for a year. There would be no extraneous factors (like the introduction of new players), and almost no amount of luck could keep the best player from winning the most money over a period of a year (providing there was a real difference in the quality of play between the best and the second best player).

Chapter One:
Tournament Play

TOURNAMENTS:
More benefits than meets the eye - and how to adjust to them

But in the absence of games like that, about the only way for a man to establish a reputation quickly is to enter and win (or perform well in) a Poker tournament.

But, that's not the only motivation for entering a tournament. By the time I won the World Hold 'em Championship, the title of champion didn't mean much to me. There are only a very few people who are good enough players themselves that I value their opinion that I'm a good one. Since all of these men are also Professionals, they know who is the best player without having to hold a tournament to decide it.

Believe me, the main motivation was the $220,000 it paid me in 1976, the first year I won, and the $340,000 in 1977 the second year. (I also won $90,000 in the *Deuce-to-Seven* World Championship in 1976 and in 1977 I won $55,000 in the *High Low Split* World Championship.)

But, you don't have to win the tournament to profit by it ... even a winner take all tournament. The tournament itself will generate other games which can make the buy in price of the tournament even the $10,000 buy in Hold 'em Championship a bargain for a good player.

After people start getting eliminated from the Hold 'em Championship, there's a solid week of the best Poker action to be found anywhere. Everybody is still in a mood to gamble, and most of them have the money to do it.

Not only do you get a chance at that money by being at the tournament, but you get to know these people, and because they're from all over the country, you develop contacts that can get you a game almost anywhere.

The contacts and side games at the *World Series of Poker** are so valuable that a lot of players who could afford to enter don't bother to. They show up for the side games and contacts alone.

I think that's often a mistake. Playing in the tournament itself helps you establish a reputation as an action man who's willing to risk a significant amount of money in a game, even if he doesn't have any substantial advantage. And action is the most important aspect of the reputation a Professional Poker player has to maintain.

Furthermore, the people who actually play in the tournaments are the ones who get the chances at the best action surrounding the tournaments. If you force another player out of a pot in a tournament, and break him because you're both playing on artificially limited bankrolls, he may get a little sore about it and invite you to try him in a regular game. There's nothing like playing somebody who is mad at you to increase your earnings for the year.

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This brings up one of the most significant points about tournaments -- the strategy of tournament play differs from the strategy of ordinary play.

It took me longer than it should have to learn this. I played in the Hold 'em Tournament for seven years before I won it. Of course, I wanted to win the money, but another way I'd justify entering the tournament year after year and it was a legitimate justification rather than a rationalization was on my general principle of investing money just to promote gambling, and to keep a reputation for being an action man.

Since I felt the need to be there anyway, I kept pondering how to win. And I noticed that Johnny Moss always seemed to do very well in the tournaments. I've always been an apostle of John's at No Limit. I used to observe and watch him in each Poker game I went to, and it seemed he was always there. Slim, Sailor and I used to joke about how crazy we were, wearing our automobiles out chasing John all across Texas. The truth was, John was usually the big winner in the games ... with myself a close second. As the years passed, the margin between us got closer and closer because I was watching and picking up his favorite plays as any young apprentice might watch and learn from the master in his field. Much of my No Limit strategy comes from those times.

I have much more respect for Johnny than a lot of younger players do. In his prime, he was the best No Limit player I've ever seen, and a lot of people don't believe that because they're too young to have seen Johnny play at his best. They fail to take into account the fact that he's some 70 years old now, and that is 20 years past the point at which most men's play begins to deteriorate. just because the years have affected your circulation and the speed at which you think, and may have softened your ability to play, does not mean you know any less about how to play. And Johnny's success in those tournaments indicated he knew a great deal about how to play. (He's the only man besides myself who has won the World Series more than once.)

So I studied Johnny's strategy and saw that he **didn't** try to win early in the tournament. He just tried to exist, and to keep from losing his money. Now, as you may remember from the earlier part of this section, this is exactly the opposite of my normal strategy in ordinary games. And I had been trying to

win the tournament the same way I have always won at ordinary games. That was wrong *for tournaments*.

I had been jeopardizing my chips on even money situations, which can be a very good strategy in the early stage of an *ordinary* Poker game, but is not good in a *tournament*, where you can't pull another few thousand out of your pocket and buy more chips.

In my new strategy, I tried to avoid playing big pots until the field had been narrowed substantially. Then later, after the field had been cut to a few players, I played more aggressively, and tried to get players to jeopardize all their checks at every opportunity.

Using this strategy designed specifically for tournaments, I've won the World Championship the last two years in a row.

It should go without saying that you should mentally train for a Poker tournament, but there, I said it anyway because it's so important. You wouldn't go into a Basketball or Golf tournament without working on your game first and you should give the same consideration to a Poker tournament. You sit down alone, you concentrate, and when the first tournament hand is dealt ... you're playing for keeps.

One of the things I like about the *World Series of Poker* is that it brings out the finest in a lot of players. There's a friend of mine who doesn't play any good Hold 'em the rest of the year, but always plays pretty well in the *World Series*.

It's been an expensive lesson to him each year, but I keep hoping that the tournament will make him realize he could be playing tough the whole year round.

Tournaments are not always won by the best player. You have to be good to win, but you can be the very best and not win in a tournament.

Every year at the *World Series* we have half a dozen or so who always make it to the last couple of tables, but have **never** won and **never** will win. Some are very solid players in ordinary situations, but just not quite good enough to win in a game against four or five of the best. And some are as solid as they come, but just don't have the killer instinct they fade at the finish.

When you're in a tournament, and it becomes obvious to you that you're probably going to lose, I think it's best to die with a bang, rather than a whimper. Go out playing with courage, instead of playing tight and meekly.

For one thing, it gives you the better of those two famous chances - slim and none to stay alive long enough to win. If you play conservatively on a low bankroll, the antes, which increase as the tournament goes on, will eat you up.

If you do get eliminated early, you can get into those very rich side games I mentioned earlier.

BE COMPETITIVE with Class

When you do get into those side games, I hope you'll remember not to kill the goose that laid the golden egg. A lot of people who come to tournaments don't really have much chance of going home winner. They're people who like to play high, largely for the enjoyment, and are willing to pay for the pleasure.

A few years ago there was such a man who played in the *World Series*. He wasn't a good player, but he could afford to lose, and besides that, we all liked him.

But one of the World Class players (a big name player) got that man into a side game and made some kind of Sucker play at him, and the fellow went for it. So instead of just taking his winnings gracefully, our "big name" player (no name in this book) showed everybody at the rail what he had done. Then to make matters worse, one of our local bookmakers made this poor fellow a 100 to 1 shot not to win the tournament. (Nobody likes to be a 100 to 1 dog.)

The guy left, and he hasn't been back. Each of the Professionals had invested $10,000 every year for several years, knowing he probably would not win it, but did it anyway to stimulate action. And then these two guys (the "big name" and the bookmaker) drove off one of the biggest action men we had ever attracted just for the sake of a few cruel laughs.

That's not only bad manners ... it's bad business. It's not only conduct unbecoming a gentleman, but especially conduct unbecoming a Professional Poker player. I don't care if you're playing $1 ante or $10,000 buy in don't ever be guilty of it.

Be highly competitive ... but do it with class.

Chapter Two:
HOLD 'EM Limit and No Limit Similarities and Differences

If you've never played Hold 'em, you're about to learn about the most fascinating of all the various forms of Poker. If you have played it, then you know what I'm talking about.

Hold 'em has more variety to it than any other form of Poker. And more complexity. It has something for everybody ... the mathematicians and psychologists ... the "loose gooses" and the "hard rocks".

Above all, it has action ... more multi way action than any other game. Almost every pot you get involved in will be tremendously exciting. The thrills and frustrations are never ending. Once you play Hold 'em ... you may never want to play any other form of Poker again. It could become your main game. It's converted a lot of other players.

But, of course, it's Poker...so it's similar in many respects to other Poker games especially Seven Card Stud. However, there are enough differences in the strategy you use and the mathematics you apply to Hold 'em - to make it a truly unique game. The mere fact that it can be played with as many as 23 players is an oddity that alone distinguishes it from any other form of Poker. (However, Hold 'em is rarely played with more than 11 players in the Limit version and No Limit Hold 'em is most often played with nine players.)

Because Hold 'em may be unfamiliar to you, it's the only game where I'm going to discuss its simple mechanics. In both Limit and No Limit, the game is always played with a Blind. The first player to receive cards is said to be *in the Blind* and must make a forced bet to start the action. It's also a *live* Blind which means the player *in the Blind* has the option of raising when the action gets back to him or he can simply "call" (without putting anymore money in the pot) if his Blind bet is not raised. In Limit Hold 'em there is usually a single Blind and each player (including the Blind) must ante. No Limit Hold 'em is also played that way. Additionally, the No Limit version is commonly played with multiple Blinds and no ante.

In a casino, the game is dealt by a House dealer and a Button (an object that physically resembles a small Hockey puck) is placed in front of the last player to receive cards. The player with the Button is considered to be the dealer and the first player to his left is considered to be the (first) Blind. A private game may or may not have a paid dealer. If it doesn't, each player takes turns dealing. In the casino, the Button is moved from player to player after each pot.

The game starts with each player receiving two hole cards the only ones he personally receives. Then, there is the first round of betting. Quite often in No Limit play that bet is also the last round of betting because someone makes a

huge bet (or moves in with all the money he has in front of him) and no one calls him. That's not an uncommon play. I do it often when I think I can pick up the antes and when I feel someone has made a weak bet.

A pot in Limit Hold 'em seldom ends so quickly. There's a second round of betting after the 'dealer *burns* (removes from play) the top card,* deals off three cards face down and *Flops* them over in the center of the table. (*Turn* and *Fall* are often used synonyms for "Flop".) Those three cards are community cards. All the players still in the pot can use them with their hole cards to make up a hand. In both Limit and No Limit play, the Flop is the most critical point in the hand. It's here you'll make the major decision as to whether or not you want to continue to play.

***The top card Is always "burned" because It might be marked ... and any player who know how It was marked would have a tremendous advantage.**

There's another round of betting after the dealer *burns one and turns one*. This is *Fourth Street* (the fourth community card). The last round of betting occurs on *Fifth Street* (after the dealer burns and turns again). That's when *all the cards are out*. The pot is won by the player with the best five card hand made up with both (or one) of his hole cards combined with three (or four) of the community cards. Occasionally, a pot is split by two players with identical hands (usually Straights) and in rare instances the *Board* (all five community cards) is the best hand. In the latter case, the pot is divided among all the players who have called all the bets on the end.

That's all there is to the mechanics of Hold 'em ... but it's hardly all there is to acquiring a mastery of the game so you can win at it consistently. What's more ... there's a vast difference in the strategies you'll use in the Limit and No Limit versions of the game.

In Limit play, you must play solid hands because it's almost impossible to run anybody out of a pot. But, in No Limit play, you can make your opponent(s) lay down a hand by using your position and your money.

You must also have a certain aptitude to be a strong No Limit player. In a word, what you must have is "Heart". Not everyone has that. Of course, you must have respect for your money and know its value ... but if you want to be a strong No Limit player you can't think you're betting a Lincoln Continental everytime you bet ten or fifteen thousand dollars. If you do think that way...you'll never make it playing No Limit.

There are also Limit players who can't rise above a certain class. I know of many such players who are super strong players when they play $30 and $60 or $60 and $125 Limit ... but, when they try to move up and play in a much higher limit game say $200 and $400 or $400 and $800 they just can't cut it. I've seen it over and over and over. They try to move up and play in a higher

game than they're used to and they get busted out. Of course, that's not true of all players. Some make the big move...and do it successfully. But most don't. So you should always bear that in mind when you try to step up in class. Don't be in too big a hurry. And if you've got what it takes ... you'll make it. A lot of what you'll need is right here on these pages.

I won't get into all the specific differences in strategy you'll use at Limit and No Limit Hold 'em until the two versions are discussed individually in the pages that follow. For now, I'll just continue to discuss some of them and also the things that make Hold 'em the unique game that it is.

Every Poker player has heard that drawing to an inside Straight is usually a Sucker play. That's generally true at most forms of Poker. But, in Hold 'em (especially No Limit) ... drawing to an inside Straight can be a sound and justifiable play. It all depends on the situation. If you can draw to that belly Straight cheap and there's the possibility you can win a real big pot by breaking your opponent if you make it ... then you should gamble and take that 5 to 1 shot.* The reward makes the risk worthwhile. I make plays like that all the time (as you'll soon learn).

There are also times when you'll play hands that would be completely unplayable if the ordinary standards you applied to other forms of Poker were applied to Hold 'em. But Hold 'em is a game in a class by itself. More so than in any other game and especially so in No Limit any two cards in Hold 'em can get the money.

I'm not saying you can indiscriminately play any two cards you're dealt. That's not the case at all. As in the other forms of Poker I've discussed, I'm going to give you standards to guide your play. What I am saying is in Hold 'em there are more exceptions to the rules than in a more "mechanical" game such as High Low Split. So much in Hold 'em depends on the Flop. And on your position.

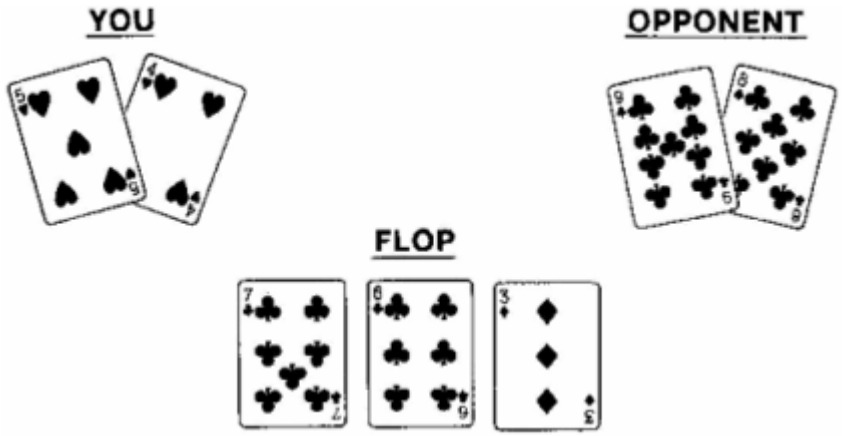
In No Limit Hold 'em, position is ... well, it's the name of the game. It's everything. If I had position all night, I could beat the game ... and I'd never have to look at my hole cards. In Limit play position's not nearly so important.

No Limit play is also far more complex than Limit because you can do so many more things. You can make a few cute little moves in Limit play...but, as I said earlier, for the most part you just have to play a solid game. You can't get too fancy at any form of Limit Poker. When your opponent knows the most it can cost him is another bet he won't be as hesitant to call as he would be in No Limit when you move in on him. In the latter case, he'll usually be in a quandry. He won't know whether you're bluffing ... or whether you have the nuts.

**Drawing to an Inside Straight is about 5 to 1 against you with two cards to come. And it's about 10 to 1 with one card to come.*

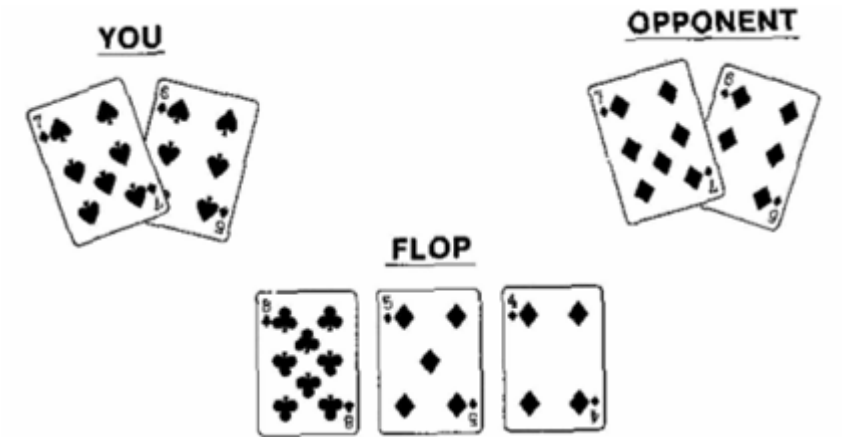
That's another thing that distinguishes Hold 'em from other games (except for the now nearly dead game of Five Card Stud). It's very easy to see when you have the nuts (or very close to it). It's not so easy to know when you have the nuts at other forms of Poker. You can use that fact to great advantage in Hold 'em because you can *represent* (bluff) when you don't have the nuts and when you're quite certain your opponent doesn't have them either. I'll show you how to do that. It's something else I do all the time.

Another interesting aspect of Hold 'em is that you can turn the nuts and be the *dog* to win the pot. Here's how that could come about:



In the above example, you flopped a Straight which is the nut hand right there but, you're not the favorite to win the pot. Your opponent is. He has a chance to make a bigger Straight and he also has a Flush draw. He has 14 wins 3 Fives, 4 Tens and 7 Clubs (other than the Five and Ten of Clubs). With two cards to come, there's a 53% chance that he'll catch one of those 14 cards. That makes him a 53 to 47 (or a 6%) favorite.

There's also a case in Hold 'em where you could be in a lot worse shape than that after you flop the nuts. This interesting situation could occur as follows:



You flopped the nuts ... but so did your opponent. More than that ... he's got a cold freerolling Flush draw. You're in a near desperate situation. The best you could hope to do is split the pot. The worst is that you're going to lose more than 1/3 of the time. There are nine Diamonds he can catch to make his Flush ... and with two cards to come, he's going to get there about 36% of the time. You turned the nuts ... but you're up against the pure nuts.

Whenever you have small connecting cards that are suited, the ideal Flop would be three cards that made your Straight two of which are in your suit to give you a Flush draw also. And if you were to run into someone else around the table who flopped the same Straight you did (and no Flush draw) ... well, that's a No Limit player's dream. Some of the biggest pots I've ever seen in Hold 'em came about just that way. Both players had a cinch ... but one of them was freerolling for a Flush.

Situations like the two just noted could occur but with less frequency in Seven Stud. For example, you could have a small Straight made and your opponent could be drawing at a bigger Straight open on both ends with a Flush draw, too. Then he'd be the favorite. Or, both of you could have an identical Straight made and your opponent could also have a Flush draw.* But these situations are far more common in Hold 'em because of the community cards.

***There's a difference between the "identical Straight" situation in Hold 'em and Seven Stud. In Hold 'em, when two players have Identical Straights made, but one of them has, in addition, a Flush draw ... the Flush draw is a pure freeroll due to the community cards (since both Straights improve the same way). In Seven Stud, the Flush draw may not be a freeroll because the other player's Straight could get higher (if It's not already Ace high).**

You'll be learning many more peculiar and interesting things about this game. For example, when you have a Pair of Aces and a single Ace flops (giving you a Set of Trips)...there'll **always** be the possibility that the next card off could make someone a Straight. (I'll discuss this in greater detail later when I tell you how I play two Aces when I flop a Set.)

In fact, Straight and Flush draws seem to be ever present in Hold 'em. It's one of the things that makes the game so action filled and so interesting. Most players indiscriminately pursue their Straight and Flush draws when it's clearly not justified by the pot odds in Limit play or the potential amount of money they can win at No Limit. I'll discuss this more thoroughly when we get into the individual sections.

You'll also discover that overcards (on the Board that are higher than a Pair you have) and kickers play a more dominant role in Hold 'em than other forms of Poker. Quite often, You'll find that your hand will become unplayable when an overcard falls or when you suspect you've got "kicker-trouble", But again, I'll get into all of this shortly.

Most players think of Hold 'em as a draw out game because someone always seems to be making a Straight or Flush ... or "spiking" a card on Fourth or Fifth that pairs their kicker. But, in reality Hold 'em is much less of a draw out game than it appears to be. That's an important point for you to remember.

In Hold 'em, whenever you have a hand against a hand (as opposed to a hand against a draw) ... the draw out possibilities are severely limited because of the community cards.

For example, when you've got A K and your opponent's got A Q ... you've got him to the point where he can catch only one (type of) card (a Queen) to win the pot (assuming he doesn't have the possibility of making a Straight or Flush after the Flop). In a game like Seven Card Stud, you almost never have an opponent waiting to catch just one card. When there aren't community cards, your opponent usually has a variety of cards he can catch to win the pot.

In No Limit (and occasionally in Limit), the reason you see so many big pots won on a draw out is because it's a big hand against a big draw. You'll rarely see a big pot played when it's a Pair versus a Pair. Unless you have a Pair of Aces or Kings (and sometimes Queens) ... you simply must not play your Pair too strongly. If you do and you're up against a bigger Pair - you're going to be a big underdog. What's more, when you have a Pair and your opponent has two overcards, you're a slight favorite.*

In light of this (see footnote), you should never re raise with two Queens or two Jacks (all the way down to a Pair of Deuces) before the flop expecting to get all your money in the pot in No Limit. You don't want to ... because if you get played with - you're either a big dog or a small favorite.

Unsophisticated players tend to play Pairs (especially Queens) much more strongly than they should. Another time they give far too much value to a hand is when they flop the bottom Two Pair. An example is when they play small connecting cards such as a 8 7** and the Flop comes K 8 7. Well, if they're up against an A K ... they're in a very dangerous situation. I know.

I've gotten broke more times playing the *bottom* Two Pair than with any other hand playing Hold 'em.

In that situation, the man with the A K can win with another King or with an Ace ... and he can cripple your hand with a *running Pair* on Fourth and Fifth. If the Board doubles off with even a Deuce Deuce on the last two cards ... you're gone. He's made Kings and Deuces ... and your hand was not helped at all. So you must **proceed with caution** when you flop the **bottom** Two Pair.

***For example, a Pair of Kings against a Pair of Aces is more than a 4 1/2 to 1 dog. And a Pair of Queens versus Ace King is only about a 6 to 5 favorite.**

****To be consistent throughout the discussion on Hold 'em, all two card hands will be stated with the higher card first.**

You should also go slow when you turn the **top and bottom** Pair. It's only when you turn the top Two Pair that your opponent's chances are considerably reduced of drawing out and breaking you. But, the danger in this (and other such situations) is far greater in No Limit than Limit because your entire table stake could be in jeopardy. In Limit, your only danger is a few extra bets.

Another reason you'll have to be extremely careful with the small connecting cards is because, if you follow my advice, you'll be playing them often. They're my favorite playing hands at No Limit Hold 'em.

An interesting point about those particular hands such as a 6 5, 8 7, 9 8, 10 9 which I play about the same way is that the J 10 is the best of the connecting cards. It's better than the others because it's the only two cards in the deck that'll make four Straights and they'll all be the nuts. It can make a nut Straight with a 9 8 7, Q 9 8, K Q 9 and A K Q. A jack Ten **can't** make a bad Straight - they're all the best hand.

All the connecting cards from a 10 9 down to 5 4 will make four Straights ... but **only three** of them will be the nuts one of the Straights will be the little end. If an 8 7 6 falls, a 5 4 can be beaten by a 9 5 or a 10 9 ... and, if a K Q J falls, a 10 9 can be beaten by an A 10.

Also, when the cards are one card apart as with a 7 5 ... you can only make three Straights and **only two** of those will be the nuts.* (You can have the nuts with a 6 4 3 or an 8 6 4 ... but you **won't** have the nuts with a 9 8 6.) Similarly, when you've got a hand that's two cards apart ... you can only make two Straights with **just one** being the nuts** (With an 8 5, you can make a Straight with a 7 6 4 and a 9 7 6 ... but **only the former** will give you the nuts.) As you can see, when the cards in your hand are separated, it not only reduces the number of Straights you can make ... but it also means that you'll be able to make fewer nut hands with them. This consideration is the reason why a 7 2 offsuit is the worst Hold 'em hand there is. It's the one hand that has the smallest probability of success.

***An exception here is Q 10 which will make three nut Straights.**

****An exception here Is K 10 which will make two nut Straights.**

Another very interesting point is that even though a J 10 can make four nut Straights ... it's not a hand you'd prefer over, let's say, a 9 8. The latter hand is preferred because you can make **more money** with it. Here's why:

If the Board comes A 8 8, you'll have a pretty good hand (with a 9 8) ... and you can feel reasonably confident (especially in a raised pot) somebody else **didn't** turn three Eights. If they did, they probably have an 8 7, a 9 8 (like you have) or possibly a 10 8. I mean they're not likely to be in there with a Q 8 or K 8. (There are people who play those hands, but if you're in there with a good player he's not likely to have such a hand.)

Now, if you have a J 10 in a raised pot, and the Board comes J J 4 ... well, you could very well have "kicker trouble". There's a lot of players that'll play an A J, K J or Q J in a raised pot. Or, if the Board comes 10 10 4 ... you could have a similar problem since you could be up against an A 10, K 10 or Q 10.

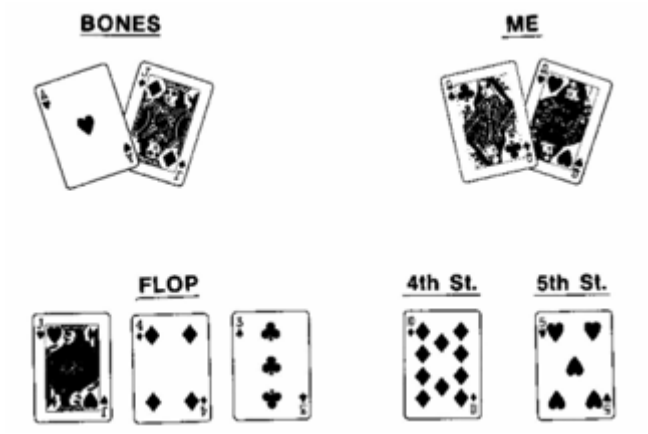
There's other interesting points to be noted about the small connecting cards that might go unnoticed. Let's say you play the 7c 6c and the Flop is 6s 6d 2h. If an off card falls on Fourth St. and you continue to play your hand pretty strong (in No Limit) and someone's still in there with you ... it's likely you're in there with another Six. Now, you have to decide what your kicker's worth. It's bad - only Seven high. So you might think you've got "kicker trouble". But, do you? If he's a good player, what's his kicker likely to be? If it was a raised pot coming in ... you could put him on one of three probable hands a 7 6 (like you have), a 6 5 or an A 6. It's not likely to be anything else. Because of the raise before the Flop, he probably **didn't** play a 10 6, J 6, Q 6 or any of those trash hands **even if they were suited**. So your Seven kicker is not so bad after all. Most people would think that if you're in there against another Six, there's just no chance your Seven could be a good kicker. But it could. It's a lot closer than it looks.

There are times you can even know more than the fact that your kicker's probably not as bad as another player might think it is. Quite often, when you know you're up against a good, sound player in the situation described above ... you can do more than merely put him on the other Six. **You can name both his cards because you can know what suit he's got**. He's either got the Ah 6h, 7h 6h or the 6h 5h. So if there's a *back door* Flush possibility (a Flush made with two *running* Hearts on Fourth and Fifth), then you could get a read on him there, too.

You can't always analyze the possible hands your opponent might have and read the situation that well. If you know a player's style and the hands he's likely to play ... you can usually come pretty close. But, if you're up against a weak player or somebody who's just *speeding around* (playing real loose and with no definable pattern) ... then you can't say such a player couldn't have, let's say, a Qs 6s. He could have. As I've so often said ... a big part of winning play is knowing your player. You've just got to know people ... and watch (carefully) how they play.

A good example of knowing your player can be illustrated by a pot I played with Gary *Bones* Berland (the man who came in second to me in the World

Championship Hold 'em event in the 1977 *World Series of Poker*). Bones said that that pot was the turning point in the whole tournament for him. It probably was. I know it was a key pot for me because it gave me a lot of chips to operate with. Here's what happened:



Before the Flop, Bones and I got about $6,000 each in the pot. On the Flop, he was first to act and bet $7,000. I just called. The reason I didn't raise was because I thought he had just exactly what he did have. I didn't want to take him out of the lead since I knew he was going to make a big bet on the next card.

The big tip off (as to what his hand might be) was his raise **before the Flop**. He was in the first seat (after the Blind) and made it $6,000 to go. **He never raised** in the first seat with two Aces or two Kings in the whole Tournament ... or any other time I saw him play. If he'd have had two Kings or two Aces ... he'd have called it and sent it around hoping somebody would raise behind him so he could make a big move before the Flop. Of course, he could've had three Jacks in that spot, but I didn't think he did. I put him on Ace jack or King Jack.

When he bet $18,500 on the Turn (Fourth St.) - that big a bet I was close to certain about his hand. As I said, when he made his first bet, I thought there was a small possibility he might have three Jacks. But all my doubts about his hand were removed when he bet the eighteen-five. Then I knew what he had ... and knew he was trying to shut me out of the pot right there. So I called the $18,500 and moved in with the rest of the money I had ($13,800). He called my raise even though he was pretty sure I had him beat at that point. It was a pretty big pot almost $78,000 before Bones called the last bet. I could've been bluffing. I've been known to do that on occasion. Bones' call swelled the pot to over $90,000 ... which put me in a commanding position for the rest of the Tournament.

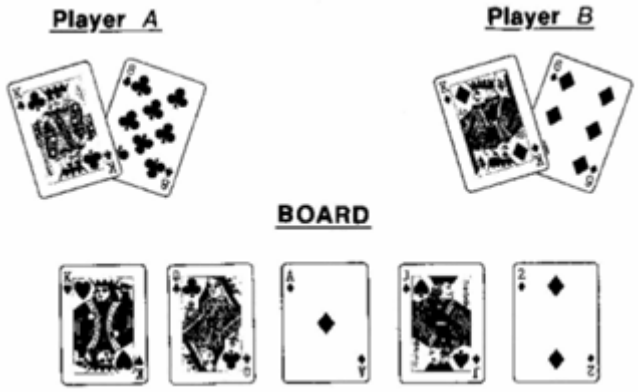
That pot illustrates another thing about my play that's misunderstood by a lot of people. I've heard that I was "lucky" in that pot because Bones had the hand he did. But, as I've explained, it wasn't luck at all. I knew his play. As

you'll later learn, I've got something of a reputation for being a "lucky" player. Of course, it's unfounded. It's rather difficult to win millions of dollars playing Poker and be on a "winning streak" for nearly 25 consecutive years. To do that ... you need a lot more than luck.

As you can see from the discussion of the pot I played with Bones, there's both art and science to putting a player on a particular hand. It's not always easy to do. It requires experience, close observation of your opponents, and a keen analysis of their style of play. I hope I'll be able to teach you how to do it with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

But there's another aspect to Hold 'em that doesn't require any special qualities ... and yet it gives a lot of players a lot of trouble. It's the simple matter of reading the Board and being able to relate it to your hand. Correctly.

You'll remember that the winning Hold 'em hand (when all the cards are out) is the best five card hand made up with both (or just one) of your hole cards and three (or four) of the community cards on the Board. So it's really a very simple matter to figure out what your best hand is. But, occasionally, it gets a little confusing and even very experienced players will make some horrible mistakes. I'll tell you about one such mistake shortly. But, for now, let's see if you can figure out who'll win the pot in this situation:



Think about it. Who wins? To an experienced player it looks like a simple question. But most beginners will answer it incorrectly. In any case, you'll find the correct answer in a footnote at the end of this chapter.

The problem posed here may seem very simple and it is but I've seen players overlook their hands completely... and for a lot of money. I saw a very big pot played where the Board was K K 4 4 7 and one guy bet eighteen thousand on the end. The other guy called with two Deuces in the *pocket* (hole). He called that **$18,000** bet with absolutely the worst possible hand. He couldn't even beat the Board! (Remember: you play the best five out of seven cards the best combination of the two cards in your hand and the five cards on the Board.)

That was an oversight of enormous proportions. It's unforgivable. But, Hold 'em is a remarkable game. As I noted earlier, you can turn the nuts in Hold 'em and have the worst hand. There are so many interesting things that can happen in Hold 'em ...some that border on the miraculous.

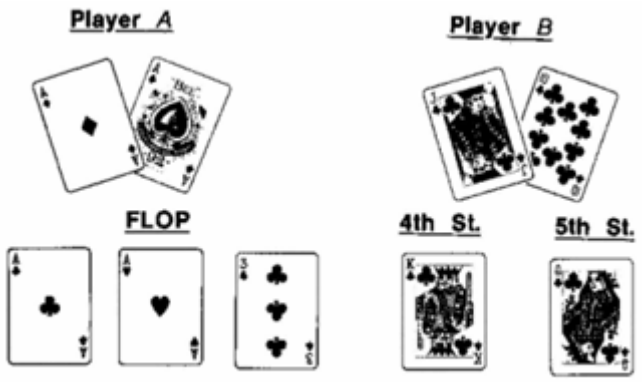
The situations in Hold 'em that appear to be miracles are when a player has to *catch perfect* in order to win ... and he does. A *perfect catch* is the biggest draw out in the game. It's when a player is "dead" to only two cards in the deck - no other cards will win it for him and he catches both of them to pull off the "miracle". I've seen such "miracles" on several occasions. They're hard to believe when you see them. Especially when you're on the losing end of them. I know. It happened to me in what was probably the biggest Poker game the world has ever seen.

The game was at the **Aladdin** (in Las Vegas) a few years ago and it went round the clock for about three consecutive months. There was over a million dollars on the table at all times. It was quite a game. And this particular pot I remember very well. I lost over twenty thousand in it.

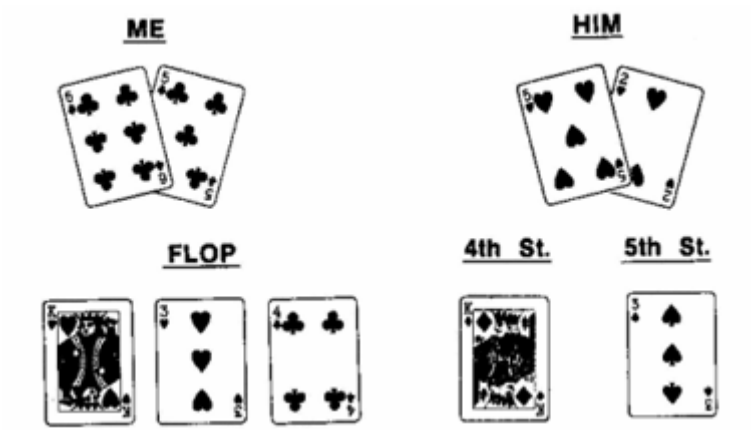
I had two Kings in the pocket and the guy in the pot with me had two Sevens. The flop came K 2 2. He moved in on me. I called him. I flopped a Full ... but I didn't win it. He caught 7 7 on Fourth and Fifth. That was the only way in the world that he could win.. and that's what he did.*

***it's almost 1000 to 1 against catching two perfect cards (989 to 1 to be exact).**

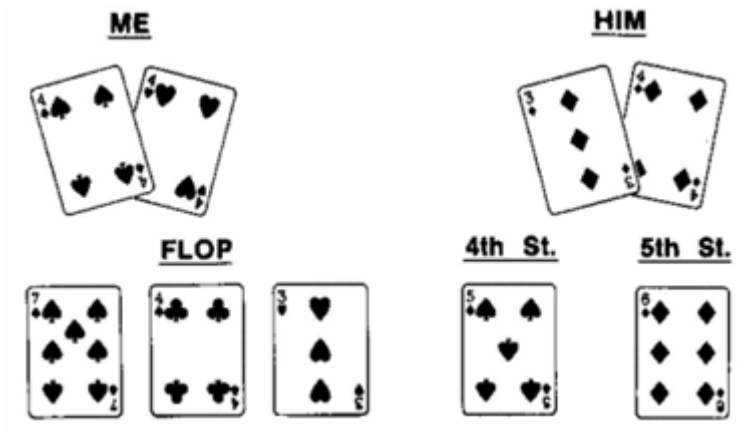
I saw a similar situation in that same game. (In three months of 24 hour play a lot of things can happen ... and they usually do.) Here's what happened in this one:



Player A flopped the nuts ... and what looks like an unbeatable hand. But, Player B beat it by catching perfect on the last two cards.

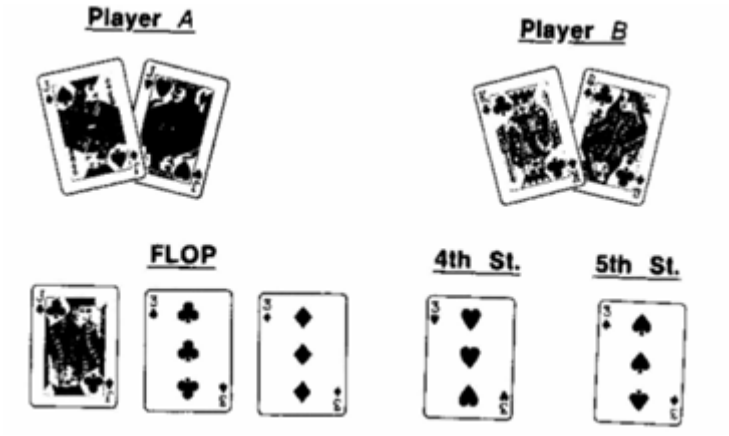


Other very "strange" things can happen in Hold 'em. One time, about eight years ago in Reno, I won a $27,000 pot with a Six high. Here's how that happened:



I bet on the Flop and he raised me. I moved in on him which, as you'll discover, is usually my style of play at No Limit once I take a position (bet) in a pot. Well, he called me. After the last two cards were dealt, he had Kings and Treys with a Five high. I had the same hand **Six high**.

If you play Hold 'em often enough, you're sure to see about everything that can happen in the game. I'm sure I have seen everything. One night at the **Dunes** (in Las Vegas) I was involved in an unusual pot. I flopped a Set (of Trips) and had to settle for a split (pot). Here's how it happened:



Here's a last illustration of the very strange things that sometimes occur in Hold 'em. This interesting situation happened at the **Horseshoe** in one of the side games (of which there are several) during Tournament time. I didn't see it, but I'm sure I've got it right because it was talked about for days after it happened.

Before the Flop, A brought it in and B raised it. A called. On the Flop, A checked and B bet. A called again. The action was the same on Fourth. On the end, A checked again and B moved in on him. At that point, A couldn't beat the Board... but, in frustration, he called. B won the pot, of course, with four Treys, King high. Bad Beat.

The brief discussion of the similarities and differences between Limit and No Limit Hold 'em that you've just read was for some quick information only. Because Hold 'em is not as widely played as Seven Card Stud, for example, this little introduction was written for those of you who know nothing at all about the game. Hopefully, even experienced players were able to learn something from it.

Actually the differences between play at No Limit and Limit Hold 'em are far greater than the similarities. They're really worlds apart. Proof of this is that I've known very few players who can really play both forms jam up.

It stands to reason that's true. Limit Hold 'em in fact, any form of Limit Poker is very much a mechanical game. There's only so much you can do when there are restrictions on the amount of money you can bet. That's not to say you can't put a play on a man in Limit. You can. You just can't get too "fancy"...because there'll be someone there to look you up most of the time.

However, in No Limit, it's quite a different story. There's so many things you can do when you've got almost as much freedom as you could want. The many options available to you in No Limit play is what makes the game so much more complex than Limit. This will become quite apparent now that I'm going to discuss the two versions separately.

The answer to the little problem posed earlier is that the pot gets split. The Eight kicker doesn't do Player A any good because he has a Pair of Kings with an Ace, Queen, Jack ... and so does Player B.

Chapter Three:
No Limit Hold'em: Introduction - Part I

The Cadillac of Poker Games

There's a story I've been hearing all my life around Poker games. It's related to a colourful player down in south Texas named Broomcorn. Whenever there's someone in the game who's playing real tight, the opposing players will needle him by saying: "Well, you're gonna go like Broomcorn's uncle." He'd perk up and respond sharply: "What do you mean I'm gonna go like him?" And they'd say: "Well, he anted himself to death."

That's a little story you should always keep in mind. Because whenever you find yourself playing a very tight and defensive style of Poker ... you'll be in danger of anteing yourself to "death". As I've said throughout these pages...the ante determines how fast you play in any Poker game. Since you'll generally play in a normal (or medium) ante game... if you play an aggressive style of Poker, you'll have way the best of it.

That's the way I play ... and it works. This is especially true of No Limit Hold'em which, in my opinion is the Cadillac of Poker games. That opinion is not because No Limit Hold 'em is my best game. It's an opinion shared by many of the world's best Poker players ... some of whom are only beginning to appreciate the great variety of skills you need to be a top level Hold 'em player. As I've said, although Hold 'em is similar in some respects to a game such as Seven Stud ... there are enough differences to put it in a class by itself. And it's truly a game that requires very special talents in order to play it at a world class level.

Above all else, No Limit Hold 'em is a game where you have to be aggressive ... and you have to gamble. One of the great things about Hold 'em is that there are so many different combinations of hands and different things you can do in different situations. As opposed to other forms of Poker, you can represent a lot of different hands in Hold 'em. You can also put your opponent on any one of several hands. It's a very complex game. You're forced to do a lot of guessing. So is your opponent.

It comes to a point where you have to take a chance. If you want to be a winner a big winner at No Limit Hold 'em ... you can't play a solid, safe game. You must get in there and gamble.
My philosophy of play at No Limit Hold 'em is a simple one: I try to win big pots ... and the small ones I pick up (win without a contest). It's a philosophy that necessitates a gambling style of play. My style. And it's this style that's fostered a lot of comment from countless players about how "lucky" I am. I've been hearing that for a lot of years. The simple fact is it's not true. Everyone

gets lucky once in a while. But no one is consistently lucky. So it has to be something other than luck to account for the fact I've been a consistently big winner through the years. It is something else. You'll soon discover what that "something else" is.

I've appeared to be a "lucky" player because every time a big pot came up, I've usually had the worst hand. There are good reasons for that. I'm a very aggressive player. I'm reaching out and picking up small pots all the time. I'm always betting at those pots ... hammering at them. And I don't want anybody to stop me from doing that. I don't want anyone to defeat my style of play.

Consequently, if I've got any kind of a hand, any kind of a draw ... I bet. And if I get raised ... I don't quit. I go ahead and get all my money in the pot knowing I've probably got the worst hand that I'm the underdog to win the pot.

Sometimes, I'll even call a Post Oak bluff (a very small bet in a big pot) just to get a chance at a draw. Of course, if I'm going to gamble like that ... the player I'm in there with must have a lot of chips on the table. For example, I'll have a 10 9 and the Flop comes 8 3 2. And, let's say, there was $10,000 in the pot before the Flop. Now, with a raggedy Flop like that, a tight player might try to pick up the pot with a Post Oak bluff of $1200. Well, that's a gutless bet* and I'll call it trying to catch a Jack or a Seven just so I could get an open end Straight draw on Fourth St. I'm in a good position to pick up the pot on Fourth whether or not I get the draw I want. The tight player who made that weak bet on the Flop is asking me to take his money. And, in most cases, that's exactly what I'm going to do when the next card falls regardless of what it is. I'm going to move in on that tight player because I feel confident he's going to throw his hand away and not put his whole stack in jeopardy.

Since I play that way, I've got a reputation of being an extremely aggressive player. And I don't ever want to lose that reputation. It's what enables me to pick up more than what would normally be considered my share of pots.

In most cases, my opponents are afraid to play back at me because they know I'm subject to set them all in. So, when they don't have a real big hand, they let go of the pot ... and I pick it up (in a way similar to what I'd do when somebody makes a Post Oak bluff at me). The accumulation of all those small pots is a big part of my winning formula. It's the bonus I get for playing the way I do ... and it's the "secret" as to why I win.

If I win ten pots where nobody has a big hand ten pots with let's say $3,000 in them ... then I can afford to take 2 to 1 the worst of it and play a $30,000 pot. I've already got that pot paid for with all the small pots I picked up. And when I play that big pot. ..it's a freeroll.

As I said a little while ago, when a big pot's played... I've usually got the worst hand. I'd say over 50% of the time ... when all the money goes in, I've got the worst hand. Obviously, I couldn't overcome that unless I had something to compensate for it. And my compensation is all those small pots I've picked up.

***I NEVER make a Post Oak bluff.**

Of course, I'm almost never completely out on a limb in a big pot. Whenever I make a substantial bet or raise ... I've almost always got an Out. Betting with an Out. That's what I call it. And it's the Out I have that makes me appear "lucky" when I'm a dog in a big pot and wind up winning it.

You'll have additional compensations for playing the aggressive way I recommend. You'll be able to break a lot of players because you're in there gambling all the time ... and, because of that, you'll get a lot of your real good hands paid off. Tight players don't get their real good hands paid off because they make a move so rarely that their hands are an "open book" whenever they do. And they almost never change gears (start playing loose). But you'll be out there betting, betting, betting all the time. Your opponents will see you're an aggressive player. They'll know you're out there trying to pick up all those pots ... so they'll sometimes give you a little loose action. And, since you'll hold a few hands (you won't always be out there with the worst hand) ... you'll break one or two of them. After that, they'll be scared to get involved with you.

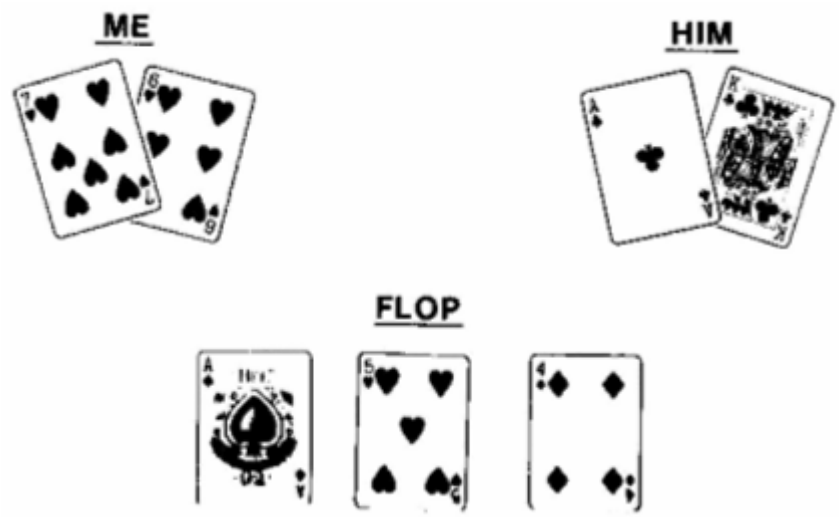
So your style of play will be very deceiving it'll get all the other players befuddled. They won't know whether you've really got a hand or not. They won't know whether you're going to set them all in or not. Because they might have to put all their money in the pot not knowing if they have the best hand ... they won't know what to do. And anytime you get your opponents in that confused situation you'll have an advantage over them.

Of course, you don't play every hand aggressively. Occasionally you slow down ... and sometimes you completely stop and throw your hand away.

You should never start out bluffing at a pot and keep bluffing at it without an Out.
For example, whenever I raise the pot before the Flop., I'm going to bet after the Flop about 90% of the time. So if the Flop comes completely ragged (one that doesn't look like anyone can have much of it) ... I'm going to bet at the pot and try to pick it up even if I don't have a piece of the Flop. But, if I get called ... I'm usually going to give it up unless I have some kind of an Out [even as little as Third Button (a Pair made with the lowest card on the Flop) or an inside Straight draw]. Sometimes, you can keep hammering on certain players and drive them off even when you don't have an Out. But, you're usually better off when you have some kind of escape hatch.

The reason I go ahead and put all. my money in on occasion when I know I've probably got the worst hand deserves repeating since it's so important for you to understand. I do it because I don't want somebody playing back at me and trying to stop me from being the aggressor. If I allow that to happen ... it'll cramp my style. I'll no longer be able to pick up all those pots when nobody has a hand. And nobody's got anything a big percentage of the time. Somebody's got to get the money that's left out there. I want it to be me.

An example will best show you what I'm talking about. Let's say I raised before the Flop with a type of hand that's one of my favorites: small connecting cards that are suited. I'm in the pot with one player who called behind me. At this point, I put him on a couple of big cards or a medium Pair. That's all right. It's what I want him to have. Now, here's what'll happen if the following Turn comes up.



With that Flop, I'm going to lead right off and bet. If he plays back at me, I'm now going to be quite sure he's got two Aces (or better). So, I'm about a 9 to 5 dog. The pot (odds) will compensate a little bit for that price ... but it won't be laying me enough to put the rest of my money in. Yet, I'll go ahead and get it all in there because I don't want that same guy, who might be a pretty good player, taking a Jack Ten and making that same play when I don't have anything. To let his play succeed, I have to throw my hand away and give him the pot. Because I want the pot ... I can't let him succeed. I want him to fear me. I want him to have the opinion I'm going to defend the money I put out there. I don't want him to have any doubts. So I go ahead and put the rest of my money in.

In making that play on the Flop, there's a good chance I can win the pot right there. Because I'm known to play any reasonable hand (and some "unreasonable" hands in a short handed high ante game) ... I've really made it tough on him. I could've flopped a Set (of Trips), Two Pair or even the Straight. I've put him on the defensive ... and he's got a lot of guessing to do.

If he decides to call me ... it's not all that bad because I've got an Out. If I make my Straight, I'm going to break him. And if I draw out on him ... it appears like I got lucky again. Well, I did ... and I didn't. When I moved in on him, I was gambling to pick up the pot. When I didn't succeed because of his call ... you might say I got unlucky. What's more ... I am supposed to make my draws once in a while. In fact, in that specific situation I'll draw out more than one third of the time (by making my Straight or back dooring Two Pair or Trips).

A very interesting thing about that particular hand of 7 6 is that I'd rather have it than a 9 8. The reason is that when you turn a Straight with a 9 8 ... you'll frequently find that somebody is on top of you. A good example is when the Flop comes Q J 10. An A K will have you nutted and even a Sucker who plays a K 9 will have you beat. I've turned many a Straight with a 9 8...but when a Q J 10 falls, I'm always real cautious with the hand. Because people play the higher cards more frequently than the lower ones, you're less likely to be in trouble when you turn a Straight with a 7 6 than you would be with a 9 8.

I'll discuss the general category of small connecting cards in great detail a little later. As I previously noted, they're one of my favorite hands. Another of my favorites is a hand where you can turn a double belly buster (two way inside) Straight. It's one of the most deceiving hands there is ... and I especially like it in No Limit. Because it's so deceptive, I almost invariably raise with it when I can win a big pot. It has all the advantages of an open end Straight... but it's not as easy to read.

An example of turning a double belly buster is when you have a Q 10 and the Turn comes A J 8. As you can see, it's very deceptive because you can make a Straight with a Nine or a King. What's more, if you catch a King and there's someone in the pot with you with A K ... you can see all the trouble he's in.

Since double belly busters are such good gambling hands (because of their deceptive qualities), you might find the following quick rule of thumb useful for now.

It's possible to turn a double belly buster with any two cards that are part of a Straight such as a 7 6, 8 6, 9 6 and a 10 6. Also, two cards with five gaps between them such as a Q 6 can also turn a double belly buster draw. (In the Supplement at the end of this section you'll find a complete rundown on all the hands that have double belly buster potential.)

When you turn a double belly buster draw, you should very carefully note which of your possible Straights will be the nuts. For example, if you have a J 9 and the Fall is K 10 7 ... both an Eight and a Queen will make you a Straight. However, only the Eight will give you the nuts. If a Queen falls on Fourth, someone with an A J can beat your Straight. So you must be careful especially in No Limit play and you must know how to read the Board perfectly (to see

what hand is the absolute nuts), Practice at home, until you don't make a single mistake. You're sure to learn after you get broke a few times with what you thought was the nuts, but was actually the second best hand.

A good case in point is the example noted in the above paragraph. A player could easily think he had the best Straight when the Queen fell ... until someone showed him an A J for all his money.

An easy way to determine whether your Straight is the nuts is by using one of the following observations. You'll have the nut Straight if:

1. **the high end of the Straight is made up with the highest card in your hand; or**
2. **the high end of the highest possible Straight is already on the Board.**

Drawing to a double belly buster is one of few exceptions in No Limit where you might be drawing to an inside Straight that won't make the best hand. As I noted earlier, inside Straight draws can be real good plays in No Limit Hold 'em because for a few chips you have the opportunity to win a very big pot. But, you almost never draw to a (single) belly buster Straight that will not be the best hand if you make it. They're longshot plays ... so when you do make them, you want to be sure they're the nuts.

For example, let's say you held a Q J and the Fall was 9 8 4. Now, you might want to draw at that belly buster trying to catch a Ten even in Limit, but mostly in No Limit. You know if you catch that Ten, you'll have a cinch hand. But if you held a 6 5 ... you'd never draw to it (with the same Fall) because there'd be two different Straights that could beat you if you catch a Seven. (You'd lose to a 6 7 8 9 10 and a 7 8 9 10 J.) If a man makes a Straight with you, he's either got you tied or he's got you beat. So, you never draw to the dead end of a (single) belly buster.

Before you decide to draw to a belly buster, you also want to feel reasonably certain that your opponent is going to gamble with you if you do make it. I mean, they're good plays ... but only if you can win a big pot if you make your longshot. So you want your opponent to have the best hand possible on the Board. If it came a 9 8 4 (as above) ... ideally, you want your opponent to have 3 Nines. You don't want him to have a Pair of Kings or A 9. You want him to have at least Eights and Nines, or better, 3 Nines. You want him to have a very big hand. Your Q J would be a very good hand against 3 Nines. It wouldn't be as good against a Pair of Nines because it won't make enough money. Your opponent will release a Pair far more readily than he'll release a Set.

So if you can get in real cheap and have the potential to win a big pot ... belly buster Straights are good gambles. But, you also have to be very selective about the belly busters you do draw to. You don't want it to be apparent to

your opponent that you could've made a Straight. In the illustration just used, you might not get the action you want if a Ten falls off on Fourth Street. A Queen jack is actually a weak hand when the Flop is 9 8 4. Your opponent might put you on a 7 6 and, when the Ten came, he might be very leery about calling a big bet you made. The Straight possibility might even scare him off completely.

But, if a possible Straight wasn't so apparent when the Ten came off ... then, you could probably win a lot of money. Let's say, you had the Qh 9h and the Flop was J 8 2. You might want to pick the Ten off there ... because that would be a very deceptive belly buster draw. And that's the kind of inside Straight you want to draw for to win a big pot the ones that aren't so obvious.

If you graduate from Limit Hold 'em to No Limit, you'll find that you'll be doing many things (besides drawing to inside Straights) that simply won't work when all it can cost your opponent is another bet.

A good example of a bluff that has a lot of power to it in No Limit, but will rarely work at Limit play is when the Board's one card off a Straight on Fourth. Let's say there's an A K Q J out there and your opponent bets. You've got a Ten in the hole so you've got the nuts, (There's no Flush possible.) Your opponent bets, you raise and he plays back. Now ... there's no question he's got a Straight also.

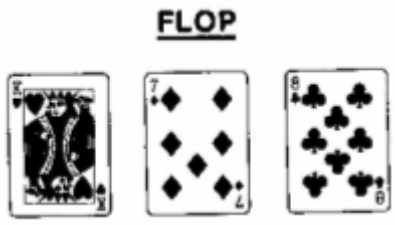
An unsophisticated player would move in on him right there because he knows he can't lose. But, what good is that? He's only going to get a split.

However, add some drama and a little acting to your play and there's a chance you could win it all. You know you're going to call his re raise ... but you don't have to do it instantaneously. Take your time. Just stall around. Study the Board real hard and shake your head several times making it appear as though you overlooked the possible Straight. You could even pick up your cards slightly and make him think you're going to throw them away. Then.. put them back down and say "OK, I'll call it,"

With all your agonizing, he's got to give you credit for a Set. You've made him think you're gambling the Board will pair so you'll make a Full. If the Board does pair on the end ... you bet him all your money. There's almost no risk to that play. You represent a Full and many a time your opponent will throw his hand away. It works a lot of times. (Of course, it's harder to do in Limit because all the guy has to do is call one bet.)

As you can see from the play just described, bluffing often involves a lot of "art". But, there's "science" to it also. There's even science to calling a bluff. The following pot I was involved in will clearly illustrate what I mean.

It was a small (ante) No Limit game early in my career. I was on the Button so I limped in with a J 10 in the hole. (There were two players in the pot in front of me.) Here's what the Flop looked like:



As you see, I had two to a (belly) Straight. Since there was no raise before the Flop, I was reasonably sure neither of my two opponents had very strong hands.

On the Flop, the guy in the first seat made a reasonable (size) bet* and the player in front of me called it. Both players had a lot of money in front of them ... so I also called.

The. fourth card was the 2s. They both checked on Fourth St. and so did I. The last card was the 3d. The Board now looked like this:

When all the cards were out, the guy in the first seat checked again. I felt when he bet (on the Flop) and then checked twice (on Fourth and Fifth) ... he had the top Pair with a small kicker. I felt the guy in front of me was drawing at some kind of Straight (and, obviously, missed his hand). Much to my surprise, he made a real out of line bet on the end far bigger than the size of the pot.

When he did that, it looked to me like he was clearly trying to steal the pot. I was also sure I had him highcarded. (As I said, I felt sure he was drawing at a smaller Straight than I was.)

If I was correct in thinking I had been drawing at the highest possible Straight ... I "knew" I'd win the pot if I just called. (I also "knew" the other player couldn't overcall because his hand wasn't strong enough.)

So I called that out of line bet...and my analysis proved correct. The player with the Pair threw his hand away and the guy who over bet the pot was drawing to a little Straight. So I won the pot with a lack high.

***Throughout these discussions, a reasonable (size) bet meant about the size of the pot.**

I didn't tell you that Poker story because I won the pot with a Jack high. And you shouldn't remember it for that reason. It has a more significant message.

I stated that I "felt" neither guy had much of anything. I then went on to explain why I had that feeling. Obviously, it was more than just a nebulous feel that I had. I had played with both those guys often ... so my feel was a certain amount of reasoning and a process of elimination was involved. And a lot of it was based on recall.

Whenever I use the word "feel"...you should understand it's not some extra sensory power that I have (although, as I noted in the section on GENERAL POKER STRATEGY, I do believe there is something to the theories relating to ESP). I recall what happened ... even though I might not consciously do it...I recall that this same play came up (or something close to it) and this is what he did or what somebody else did. So I get a feeling that he's bluffing or that I can make a play here and get the pot. But, actually my subconscious mind is reasoning it all out.

You build up a history of every player you ever played with ... I mean everyone that you've ever done any serious gambling with. You've got some kind of information on them. It's there ... buried in your mind. And you don't have to concentrate to get it out. When the time comes to use it, it'll come naturally you won't have to force it.

All good Poker players have tremendous recall. They reach back into the depths of their mind and remember what a certain guy did in a similar situation. A good player might not realize what he's doing ... and he might not know exactly what it is ... but he feels he can make a real big play or make a super call when he feels a guy's bluffing. The vibrations are definitely there. He just knows it.

And what it actually is, is a sense of recall. The same (or similar) situation existed some time ago ... and he knows exactly what to do in this one. It's usually a stress situation when a (relatively) big amount of money's involved that these things are always true.

There's another kind of "feel" you can have in a game that doesn't depend on recall. This type of feel depends on close observation of what's going on during a particular session. You acquire this feel when you notice that a certain player is really off his game and playing far below the quality of play he's normally capable of. You see this happen all the time. A lot of players lose control and go on tilt after they get one (or more) big hands cracked (beaten). They become unglued (lose their composure). To recoup their losses, they start playing weak hands ... and they play those hands badly. Very badly. It's easy to capitalize on those situations. Here's how:

Let's say you're in a game with a high ante structure (a subject I'll soon discuss) and naturally everybody's playing real fast. You played a 9 6 and the Flop came A 9 8. Normally, if you got played with, you'd be very concerned about that Ace (and also your kicker). But, in this case, you're in the pot with a

player who's losing and, from what you've been able to observe, he's playing very badly. You check on the Flop ... and so does he.

Now, all of a sudden, you get a "feel" that all he's got is the Third Button (a Pair of Eights). The reason why you feel he got "something" (a small piece of the Flop) is because he checked. He didn't bet because he wants to get the hand shown down. If he had nothing at all ... he would've bet to try to steal the pot. And, you "know" he doesn't have an Ace. You know the worst that can happen is that he could also have a Nine and run you down (chase you). Well, what you want is for him to run you down with an Eight which is what you really think he has. You know if you're really off base ... he might have a Nine.

But, you feel confident you're not wrong and if a Rag falls off on Fourth ... you bet. You know he's going to call you ... almost out of desperation because he's losing. So you make some money on Fourth and also on the end. You know he's not going to show you a hand unless he gets lucky and pairs his kicker.

The very surprising thing about the previous discussion is that the player I was referring to who's on tilt is actually a very good player. He could even be world class. Of course, the super stars of the Poker world those who I play against on a regular basis are able to exercise far more control than the average player. Yet, even a real good player has moments when he's playing considerably off his usual game. So, you have to be observant and take advantage of such opportunities when they present themselves. You'll have far more opportunities to do that against the average player simply because they lose control far more often.

There's something else that's extremely important that you'll have to be constantly aware of. It's this:

You'll have to be able to categorize your opponents as to the quality of their play ... and you'll have to play very differently against strong players than you do against weaker ones. This is of crucial importance in No- Limit play.

Chapter Three:
No Limit Hold'em: Introduction - Part II

Shortly, I'm going to go into considerable detail on this very important subject because I've seen very good players fail to adjust their strategy when they're in a pot with a certain type of player. In fact, as recently as the 1977 World Series of Poker (in the World Championship Hold 'em event), some of the best players I know made such amateurish mistakes that I wouldn't have believed it possible if I hadn't seen it with my own two eyes. But, before I get into the specific details, I want to give you two general rules to guide you in this matter.

1. **Against a low grade player ... you simply make the obvious play. That is, you don't try to get fancy when you're in a pot with a weak player. You don't try to make subtle moves that'll be far beyond his capacity to understand or appreciate. You play fundamentally better (rather than strategically better) than a weak player. In a word, you outplay him.**
2. **Against a higher grade player ... (someone who could be thinking along the same lines as you)…you must mix up your play. Sometimes you make an obvious play against a strong player (as you always would against a weak player) ... and sometimes you go at it another way and make a play that's not so obvious. Most of the time ... you have to put a play on (outmanoeuvre) a strong player.**

In a nutshell, that's all there is to it. And it seems simple and logical enough. There's even very good players who know that that's what they're supposed to do. But knowing something ... and being able to execute it are not the same thing. As I said, I saw some world class Poker players make mistakes in the 1977 World Championship Tournament that only an idiot would make.

There was a particular player Who entered the Tournament for the first time ... and, almost immediately, it was easy to see that he was a weak player. He was the supreme example of a calling station a player who's next to impossible to bluff.

Even though I had never played against him before, it didn't take me very long to recognize the type of player he was. I've played with thousands just like him throughout my career. So I knew what to do when I was involved with him in a pot. More precisely ... I knew what not to do. I was not going to try to bluff him. Not even once.

I quickly decided that if I was in the pot with him, I was going to show him a hand. And, if he got lucky enough to beat me ... well, he was going to beat a hand. My mind was made up about that.

But there were other very good players in the Tournament who tried to run over him tried to force him out of a pot. They would bluff at him constantly ... and they were rarely successful. If he had anything at all ... he looked 'em up. As I said, he was the ultimate calling station. He looked enough of them up often enough to finish far higher than he was legitimately supposed to. He was probably about a 1000 to 1 dog to finish as high as he did. The reason he did was simply because so many players and some very experienced ones just handed him their money. They almost literally gave it away to him.

What they should not have done is try to bluff him. It takes an idiot, in my book, to bluff at a man who you know is going to call you.

You simply can't bluff a bad player ... because a bad player will play when he's got some kind of a hand and will pass when he doesn't have a hand. I mean ... it's clear cut. You don't have to be an expert psychologist to figure out what he's doing. All you have to know is if he's in the pot.. he's got something. And you're not going to get him out of the pot by trying to bluff him.

Above all ... you don't want to gamble with a weak player. Forget about that ... show him a hand. You do very fundamental things against a bad player. Obvious things. That is ... no tricks ... no strategic plays ... nothing fancy. Play straight forward Poker against a weak player.

For example, if a weak player raised the pot coming in (before the Flop) and then checked it on the Flop and checked again on Fourth St. well, I would automatically bet (regardless of what I've got) because I'd know he didn't have anything at all. It's simple to outplay him because his actions tell me whether he's got something or not. There's no mystery about it.

I could also outplay him by adjusting my style to his. For example, I noted that I'm always stabbing around trying to pick up pots. I could still do that with a weak player in the pot ... but I'd adjust my play because he's in there. Like I might raise him without looking at my hand. Now, here comes the Turn and he checks. Well, I'm going to bet at that pot in the dark ... because I know he doesn't have anything and I also know he's probably going to pass. He checked, didn't he? If he had something, he would've bet.

Of course, I might have to make a further adjustment. If he checked (on the Flop) and then called me ... I'd give him credit for something. If there's no Straight or Flush draw out there ... he's probably got a small piece of the Board. (If he had a big piece...he would've bet.) If he checks again on Fourth and calls me again ... then I'd know I'm going to have to show him a hand on

the end unless I thought he was drawing and missed his hand. Only then would I think I had a chance to steal it on the end.

Another way I'd adjust my style when I was in the pot with a weak player is when I turned a real big hand say, a Set of Trips. As you'll learn, I don't slow play that hand. I always lead with it. But, against a weak player...I would check it because I'd know that if he had anything, he would bet. And I'd get to break him anyway. If he didn't have anything, I wouldn't mind giving him a free card. I want him to improve his hand. I want him to make something so I could break him there.

It's more difficult to outplay a strong player. You can't do simple things against better players you've got to put a play on somebody who knows what's obvious. And if he does something that's obvious like I think he's trying to pick up the pot ... well, I'll put a play on him and raise him with nothing because he might throw his hand away. But if a weak player bets at me, I'm not going to raise him... unless I've got something.

Since a good player will understand the obvious, I must try to deceive him. I'll even put a play on more than one good player. For example, if someone brought it in (raised it) in an early position and three players just called it ... I might try to pick up that pot. I might move in with nothing.

Against a good player, you'll have a lot more tools to work with ... many different strategies to use. You're effectively restricted to a "pickaxe and shovel" basic, fundamental things against a weak player. Never forget that. Don't try to devise elaborate strategies to use against a bad player. They won't work against him. Use sophisticated plays against a good player. They'll work against him.

Another point you should note about weak players is that they come in several varieties. They're not all like the one I just described. Some are completely opposite. There are some who check their good hands and bet their bad hands. They like to bluff ... and they do it almost all the time. So, with a player like that, you keep on checking it to him ... and let him bluff his money off to you.

Note that I didn't say you check raise him. You don't want to take the play away from that type of player. In fact, check raising is a strategy I rarely use. I think it's a weak play. I'll do it occasionally ... but not often.

However, I suppose I encounter more check raising than the average player because I play so aggressively. If a player makes a hand, he'll check it to me thinking that I'm going to bet ... and he's usually right. Most of the time, I will bet. So he checks it to me ... and after I bet he raises.

As I said, I don't do too much check raising myself. I'll usually do it when someone seems to be trying to take the play away from me. Perhaps, I might check it ... and move in on him or something like that. But, I don't do it often. Check raising is not really a part of my philosophy of Poker. I do it on occasion you have to keep people in line but I don't look for opportunities to check raise somebody.

Surprisingly, if you employ my style of play at No Limit Hold 'em ... you won't be in constant fear of getting check raised. By playing aggressively, you might think that "well, they're probably going to get me this time" every time you bet. But, even though you'll probably encounter more check raising than most players, you'll be amazed at how many times your opponents keep throwing their hands away whenever you bet.

It all reverts back to my basic style of play. My opponents know that if I've got any kind of a hand any kind of a draw and they do check raise me ... then all of my money (and theirs) is going to the middle. And ... because they know that ... it keeps them off me it stops them from playing back at me.

There are other things that my aggressive style of play does for me. Not only does it give me an "umbrella of protection" from getting played back at (in most cases) and not only does it make my opponents constantly fear me and therefore make it easy for me to pick up numerous pots without a contest ... but it has other advantages as well. I've already told you I also get a lot of loose action. This may seem contradictory ... because how can I pick up pots easily on the one hand and get a lot of loose action on the other? But, it's easy to understand when you realize that the pots I pick up are when nobody's got a hand. And, as I said, that's a big percentage of the time. When I get so called "loose action"...it's when somebody does have a hand. At those times, all the money is subject to go to the center. And when it does as you now know I've usually got the worst hand.

But I can also find a hand when I look down. And, once in a while, it's the best hand. When I'm up against another hand at those times ... the pot gets to be a mountain. It wouldn't be nearly as big if I wasn't the aggressive player I am. I'd never get the action I do when I've got a hand if I was known to slow play hands ... or do a lot of check- raising. That's why I rarely do those things.

An example of why being known as an aggressive player and constantly playing that way is the most profitable way to play Poker is clearly illustrated by the following situation.

Let's say I turned a big hand on the Flop a Set of Trips or even Two Pair. I'm first to act and I'm in the pot with someone who raised before the Flop. He's supposed to have a strong hand. He's probably got a big Pair in the hole bigger than anything that showed on the Flop.

In this situation, there's a principle I always apply in Hold 'em. I always make it a habit to lead into the raiser whenever I turn a big hand.
Most players will slow play their hand in that spot ... or hope to get in a check raise. When they do that, they're playing it wrong ... as you'll now see.

By betting right into the raiser, you make him think you're either trying to take the pot away from him or you've got some kind of draw or a mediocre hand. Consequently, he'll almost invariably raise you. At that point ... you can get all your chips in. And it's tough for him to get away from his hand because he has so much money already in the pot.

The raiser expects you to check to him on the Flop. I mean, he knows you know he's supposedly got a strong hand. He raised coming in, didn't he?

When most players turn a Set with a small Pair (or turn Two Pair with small connecting cards) ... they do the obvious. They check ... waiting for the raiser to bet. And then they put in a raise.

That's the wrong way to play it. That way they give the raiser an opportunity to get away from his hand at a minimum loss. But, if you lead into him ... and he raises there's no savings. He's almost committed to get the rest of his money in the pot.

Even if it's a raggedy Flop without a Straight or Flush draw you should still make the same play. Perhaps even more so ... because with three Rags out there a bet would indicate weakness rather than strength to most players. Since it does look like you're weak (and like you're trying to take the pot away from him) ... the average player will respond to your bet by raising.

The only risk you take when you play the hand that way is that the raiser might not raise you on the Flop because he might not have a hand ... but he might bluff at it if you check and you'd win the amount he bluffed.

However, it's far more probable he does have a hand. He's supposed to have a hand! He's represented a hand. He was the raiser. On that very reasonable assumption, I go ahead and lead into his hand. When compared to checkraising in that situation, it's the bigger money making play, by far. I think it's one of the strongest plays in Hold 'em.

If you turned a Set in an unraised pot (and it was a raggedy Flop) ... you'd have to play the hand quite differently. Depending on what Set you flopped, you might not even play it at all. You'll see what I mean in a minute. But, the concept you should understand is this:

In No Limit play, you must be very careful you don't lose all your chips in an unraised pot.

Here's what I mean: let's say you and six other players got in for the absolute minimum that is, you all limped in for a $50 force (the Blind bet). Everybody just called. Nobody raised ... so the field wasn't weeded out at all. Now, a J 4 2 flops. You turn 3 Deuces. In the previous situation with this same Flop you should lead right into the raiser with your Set. He's probably got an overpair and will raise as expected. But, in the present situation, you must play it carefully. Very carefully. You turned a hand that's easy to get broke with. There's nothing in the pot ... and you don't want to get broke in a "nothing" pot.

The six people in the pot with you tried to turn the nuts for free. And one of them might have the nuts. Or close to it. So when one of the players commits all his money when there's only a few hundred dollars in the pot ... you better watch out. Your 3 Deuces probably aren't any good.

You could be up against 3 Jacks, but that's not as likely as 3 Fours since there was no raise before the Flop. That's the hand you should be afraid of 3 Fours.

I'm not saying you shouldn't play the hand. That's not the case at all. I'm just saying that you have to play it carefully because nobody showed any early strength. Therefore, you're not likely to be up against a big Pair. However, you could be facing another Set. Nevertheless, if it's checked to you, you've got to bet it. But you don't want to get broke with the hand because it was a nothing pot to begin with. If you get raised, your own judgement in the particular situation will have to prevail. With the Third Set (Deuces), you might want to go on with the hand ... and then you might not. With the Second Set (Fours) ... you just could not get away from it. Someone's going to have to show you 3 Jacks. That's all there is to it.

An important point for you to remember is that in a judgement situation you're always better off sticking to your first impression. Once you decide what a man's most likely to have especially in No Limit play you should never change your mind. You'll probably be right the first time ... so don't try to second guess yourself.

With constant observation of your opponents' play... you'll learn how to put them on a (probable) hand. Once you do...don't change your mind. Stick to your first impression. Have the courage of your convictions!

Chapter Three:
No Limit Hold'em: Introduction - Part III

Having courage is one of the most important qualities you must have to be a good No Limit player. If you don't have it ... you'll have to restrict your play to Limit Poker. You need courage in Limit too ... but not nearly to the degree you must have it at No Limit.

A lot of Limit players and now I'm talking about the very best Limit players just can't play No Limit. They don't have the "heart" for it. What's more ... they can't adjust to the complexity of No Limit play and they find it very hard to go from what's essentially a mechanical game (Limit) to one that takes in everything (No Limit). Only very special players can make that transition successfully.

You also have to have a different "feel" for No Limit play. I mean, you have to be right just about all the time especially when your entire stack's at stake.

In Limit play, you're not going to get knocked out of a game by one or two mistakes. You can make several mistakes in a Limit game and still win the money ... because your opponents are making more mistakes than you are. Playing No Limit, you can make just one crucial mistake at any time and you can lose all your chips.

It not only takes a lot of "heart" to play No Limit ... it also takes a lot of "muscle". You need "muscle" in Limit too.. but you need much more of it at No Limit.

A strong No Limit player can keep "slapping you around" just "lean on" you and keep "leaning on" you until you melt. Of course, that could happen in Limit too ... but, again, not to the same degree.

The very best players I know are extremely aggressive players ... and that's what makes them the great players they are. The more aggressive they are ... the better they are. It's that simple. And I firmly believe that's what accounts for the difference between a very good player and a truly top player. It's the dividing line. That's for sure.

There's not a man alive that can keep beating on me. I refuse to let somebody keep taking my money ... and all the other truly top players are the same way. An aggressive player might do it for a while ... keep leaning on me. But, at the first opportunity I get, I'm going to take a stand and put all my money in the pot.

It's like that little boy who keeps sticking his head up and keeps getting slapped all the time. Well, sooner or later he's not going to stick his head up any more. So if a guy keeps going on and on and keeps pounding on me ... then me and him are fixing to play a pot.

Like me, all the top players know you have to be extremely aggressive to be a consistent winner. You have to bet, bet, bet...all the time. If I find somebody I can keep betting at and he keeps saying "take it Doyle", "take it Doyle"...well, I'm going to keep pounding on him. I'm not going to let up. And that poor guy never will win a pot from me. He's going to have to have the nuts to call me.

That's what most players do ... they keep throwing their hand away. They're weak. They sit down and try to make the nuts on you. That's hard to do. So you keep whamming on 'em and whamming on 'em and you just wear 'em down. And, sooner or later, you'll win all their money.

Perhaps now, you can see more clearly what I explained to you earlier. When a big pot comes up ... I've usually got the worst hand. That weak player finally picked up the nuts ... and that's what I usually look at in a big pot. But, I've already paid for that big pot with all the other pots I've won. So I'm freerolling with all that weak player's money (and the money of all the other weak players in the game).

You can't do that against a truly top player in No Limit ... because he's fixing to make a stand and play back at you. And that's the big difference between a merely good player and a great one.

Another important difference is that a real top player can win money with a marginal hand. A weaker player can't do that. They don't know how ... or they're afraid to put any money in the pot in a borderline situation. They want the nuts (or close to it) before they'll jeopardize any of their chips. They don't want to do too much gambling...so they check a lot of hands that I'd bet for value.

Betting for value is what it's all about. For example, if it came down to a tough situation on the end and a tight player had Two Pair, but there's a possible Straight out there ... well, that tight player would probably check it trying to show the hands down.

In that same situation, as long as I felt reasonably sure my opponent didn't have that Straight I'd be more aggressive. I want to make some money on the end. I want to get value for my Two Pair. So I'd bet... and try to sell my hand for the most money I thought I could get.

I don't have to have the nuts to bet my hand on the end. If I feel like I've got the best hand ... I'm going to bet it and get value for it. A more conservative

player would check it on the end and he'll get his check "called". So he'll lose that last bet.

I never was a tight player ... even when I first started to play. Experience has taught me a lot. Early in my career, I didn't know how to start at a pot and quit ... like I can now.

A very big part of winning consistently and winning big at No Limit is to get the other guy in a position where if he makes a bet he's actually jeopardizing all his chips as opposed to you jeopardizing all of yours.

That has always been the key to No Limit play as far as I'm concerned. I want to put my opponent to a decision for all his chips.
For example, if a guy's got twenty thousand dollars in chips and you lead off for six or seven thousand ... you're really betting him twenty thousand. This is because he knows if he calls that six or seven thousand ... well, then, he's got to go for the rest of it.

You're betting seven thousand ... he's betting twenty.

However, if he bets me seven ... it's just the reverse. So, I always try to make the bet that puts him in jeopardy ... not me. If he's right ... and I'm bluffing ... he's going to move in with his twenty thousand and I'm not going to call him. So he'll win seven thousand. But, if he's wrong ... and I've got a hand....he's still going to move in. But now he's going to get called and he's going to lose twenty thousand.

So he's laying me about 3 to 1 his twenty thousand to my seven. I put the commitment on him. I make him commit himself. I'm not committed. Whether he thinks I am or not ... I'm not. That's the beauty of it. He's thinking about my bet ... and wondering how much more he's going to have to put in there.

It's an either/or situation. Either I'm bluffing ... or I've got the nuts. And against me, he knows it could cost him twenty thousand his whole stack unless he throws his hand away.

And, boy, you'd be surprised how many times they say "take it Doyle", "take it Doyle". They just throw their hand away and throw their hand away ... over and over and over again. I mean ... even I'm surprised. I think to myself "well, he CAN'T throw this one away".. but I bet anyway. And there goes his hand ... chunk! It finally gets to be mechanical with them. And I've won another pot.

I've stolen so many pots I couldn't begin to count them. And most of the time, I've actually had to force myself to bet. I'd be playing and I hadn't held a hand all night. Yet ... I won every pot because I hadn't bet into the nuts yet.

It goes on and on like that. I pick up a hand and I've got nothing. The Flop comes out there and I've still got nothing. So I kind of have to hit myself to bet at it because there's a guy I've been pounding on and pounding on. And, all the time, I'm thinking "how can he throw his hand away this time"? But I bet ... and away it goes. Chunk! ... one more time.

If he takes a stand and raises me ... it gets back to my basic philosophy. If I've got a hand ... I'll go with it even though I know it's sometimes the worst hand.

By now, you should have a very good idea of how I play No Limit Hold 'em. I hope this somewhat lengthy introduction gave you a sufficient "feel" for my style of play...and I also hope it will help you to understand how I play specific hands in various situations. I'll discuss those shortly.

However, when you read those discussions you should realize it's quite difficult to state exactly what I'd do with a specific hand in a particular situation. So many things are involved. No Limit Hold 'em is a very complex game.

Most of the things I'll say will be an accurate reflection of what I'd generally do. But, I might do something else or even something completely opposite depending on who's in the pot with me and whether or not I have position on him.

Always remember ... No Limit Hold 'em is a game of position and people.

There'll be a lot of times when only your good judgement will dictate the proper play. Situations will come up all the time when a hard and fast rule will prove inadequate. Poker especially No Limit Hold 'em is not a game you can learn to play well in "ten easy lessons". A thousand hard lessons might not be enough. There are simply too many variables involved. Even the most sophisticated computer in the world would be unequal to the task.

Nevertheless, the "lessons" you'll soon be learning will go a long way in helping you to master No Limit Hold 'em. The general principles and concepts that I'll discuss about the play of specific hands will give you a far greater command of the game than almost all the players you could expect to be competing with. I wish I knew all the general guidelines you'll soon be reading when I first started to play. It would've made things a lot easier for me. That's for sure.

But before I get into how you should (generally) play specific hands ... there should be a discussion of the ante, betting structure, bankroll requirements and other considerations you'll have to make before you sit in on a No Limit Hold 'em game. So that's what I'll do now.

Chapter Three:
The Ante and Other Considerations

If I had to choose a particular size game that would be close to "perfect" for No Limit Hold 'em ... it would be nine handed. Of course, I'm talking about a Ring (full) game.

Actually I prefer to play in a short handed game with about four or five players. The reason is that in a short handed game with a high ante you're forced to get in there and play. You can't just sit there and wait for the big Pairs or Ace King or even small connecting cards. If you do..."you'll go like Broomcorn's uncle". So, a game like that suits my style just fine. It gives me plenty of room to muscle the game.

A "full" game with nine players is all right, too. That's just about the right amount of players for a Ring game where there'll be good action. I mean, there'll be people coming in the pots because they'll know they won't have to be looking at the nuts every hand.

However, when that nine handed game all of a sudden turns into an eleven handed game ... well, the complexion of the game changes completely. What was once a relatively fast and loose game becomes a thing of the past. The players no longer get in there and play as often. The game begins to screw down real tight.

There's a lot more combinations out every hand with eleven players than with nine players. So everyone stops playing borderline hands and they start waiting for the really good ones. In short, they don't do as much gambling ... so the action really dries up.

Many Poker games are like that and they stay like that unless "something" happens to change the character of the game. More than anything else, the "something" that'll change that tight game back to the loose game it once was is for one of the players to start giving a lot of action. As I've said ... that's what I do. I'm known as an action player. It's an image I've always had. Because I give action…I get it.

I mean, I'll get into a Poker game and almost from the very first hand I'll start gambling. I'll be taking chances... betting ... raising ... re raising ... moving in. That'll stir up a game real fast. One player can do it. That's all it takes. And that player's usually me.

I don't merely talk loose ... I prove I'm loose by my actions. You know the old cliché: "*a first impression is a lasting impression*". Well, that first impression I

create lasts throughout the session ... even though I might *change gears* (go from loose to tight to loose) several times during the course of a game.

Being able to adjust your playing *speed* is a very important part of being a top player. There are a lot of reasons for this.

1. You **never** want to get yourself stuck in an identifiable pattern. You must mix up your play. If you do ... you'll always keep your opponents guessing.
2. As I said, you also want to create an image... the image of a loose, gambling type of player who gives a lot of action. But, it has to be the image of a good loose player not the image of a fool who's throwing a party (giving his money away).
3. Since you'll most likely get off loser if you play as I recommend and start *plunging around* (playing very loose) almost as soon as you begin to play ... you'll have to *gear down* (start playing tight) after you've laid your (image creating) groundwork. Then you'll start playing loose again.. and you'll continue to vary your speed throughout the session.
4. You'll also want to adjust your speed to the varying speeds of particular players. If there's a guy in the game who's *speeding around* ... then you do exactly the opposite by gearing down - and remember to play only solid hands against him. On the other hand, if you notice that a certain player is playing real tight... then you can start bluffing at him.
5. The game itself might dictate the speed at which you'll have to play. If everyone is playing real loose and all the pots are being jammed ... then you start playing real tight. Conversely, when the game's so tight you can hear it squeaking ... you should play loose and pick up all the pots you can.
6. When players start dropping out of the game (and their seats remain vacant) ... you have to move into "high gear". As I said, you can't sit back and wait in a short handed game. If you do, the ante will get you because the good hands don't come often enough. So you must play ... or you might as well quit the game.
7. And, of course, there's the ante. That's the main thing that determines how fast you play. Actually, the absolute size of the ante is not what's important. It's the relationship of the ante to the amount of money you have. A $10 ante in a No Limit game would be quite high if all you had was $500. But, if you had $5000 ... that $10 ante would be very low. In the first (high ante) game ... you'd have to play pretty fast. You could slow down considerably in the latter (low ante) game.

The ante is such an important determining factor as to how fast you play that the *trouble* and *trash* hands I later discuss would become big hands if you were anteing high enough. In fact, that's the case in the World Championship Hold 'em Tournament because of the way it's structured. It starts with each

player anteing $10 and there's a $50 Blind. According to a predetermined time schedule and, as players are eliminated the ante and Blind get higher and higher as the tournament progresses ... until it's down to the final two players. At that point, each player antes $1000 and blinds it for $2000. If you sit around and wait putting in that kind of money every pot ... you'll go faster than Broomcorn's uncle.

You've got to play almost every hand when you're anteing that high. At the very least, you've got to see the Flop. So, it's really not all that surprising I won the 1976 and 1977 World Championships with "trash" hands. The only thing that is surprising is that in both years the hands were almost identical.

In 1976, when I won $220,000, the last pot had $176,000 in it. I won that pot with the 1Os 2s. All it had on the Flop was a Pair of Deuces ... but I caught two running Tens on Fourth and Fifth. Jesse Alto (a very experienced non professional who owns an automobile dealership in Houston, Texas) was the man who came in second.

As you know, in 1977, Bones was the young man who came in second to me. (He's a Pro who's now living in Las Vegas, but is originally from Los Angeles, California.) In the last pot with Bones I had a 10d 2h and flopped a Pair of Tens. This time, I caught a Deuce on Fourth St. but I filled up with a Ten on the end. That last pot was worth $130,000 and I won $340,000 in the 1977 Tournament.

Of course, in a normal ante Ring game, it would be a rare case when I'd play those hands. There's little reason to when the ante doesn't "force" you to play. A major exception would be when I play a pot for the sole reason of trying to steal it. Then, it doesn't make any difference what I have. I mean, I could be playing the hand without even looking at my hole cards. At such a time, I'd be playing my money, my position and a particular player. My hand wouldn't matter. If I was forced to look at it (because I got played with), I might find two Aces, Ace King ... or trash.

You'll almost surely have to get some No Limit experience under your belt before you'll be able to play a pot completely blind. So, in the beginning, I suggest that you restrict the way you'll play specific hands to the recommendations I'll soon be making. However, it's important for you to understand that those recommendations as to the hands you should play and the way you should play them are what I would do in a normal or medium ante Ring (nine handed full) game. In a game different from that ... you'll have to adjust your play as previously discussed.

In order to help you determine what constitutes a normal (medium ante) game, you should use the following table as a guide.

Nine-Handed Game -- No Limit Hold'em

Type of **ANTE-GAME** general description	**ANTE** each player	with single **BLIND** 1st Seat only	multiple **BLINDS**			**BUY-IN*** absolute minimum
			Button	1st Seat	2nd Seat	
Very Low	$ 1	$ 2	$ 1	$ 2	$ 5	$ 200
Low	2	5	2	5	10	400
Medium	**5**	**10**	**5**	**10**	**25**	**1000**
High	10	25	10	25	50	2000
Very High	25	100	25	50	100	5000

***Twice the *minimum* buy-ins listed here would be much better. More than twice would be better still.**

In the above table, the *very low* ante game where each player antes $1 (with or without the Blind) would be approximately equivalent to the game with the multiple Blinds of $1, $2 and $5. Assuming there are nine players, it would cost you $9 a Round in the first case. (It would be an additional $2 if each player had to take the Blind once a Round.) In the game with the three Blinds, it would only be $8 a Round. As you can see, it doesn't make much difference whether everyone antes or the multiple Blind structure is used.

Sometimes, the game is structured where the "dealer" *(Button)* and the first Blind have to blind it for an identical amount. This would be the case when the Blinds in the low ante game were $5, $5 and $10 instead of the $2, $5 and $10 seen in the table. Also, there are some games that have four Blinds. The effect of that would be to move a game as classified in the table to a higher classification. For example, a game with four Blinds of $5, $10, $25 and $50 would be a high ante game...not a medium ante game.

Of course, all the terms in the table from *very low* to *very high* are applied to the ante on an **absolute** basis. That is, because of the antes, they would be called very small and very big No Limit games, respectively. But, when you consider the various games listed **relative** to the **minimum** buy ins in the table ... there's actually very little difference between them. (To get around the table in each of the games shown, it'll cost you about 4% of your buy in if you sit down with an absolute minimum buy.)

You wouldn't want to sit down with less than the minimum buys shown. As the footnote states, you should definitely consider buying in for more.

When I play in a game with three Blinds of $25, $50 and $100...I never sit down with less than $20,000. What's more ... I like to have as much as (or more money than) any other player at the table. If my stacks are not approximately equal to the guy with the most money then I couldn't break him, could I?

And ... I practice what I preach. I start playing fast right away. I've always played like that. Even when I was just starting out. Back then I'd buy in for a thousand (in a small No Limit game) and I'd usually get stuck (lose) that first

thousand. Then, I'd pull up and start playing tighter and I almost always got even ... or won.

About three out of four plays, I'd lose that first thousand ... but, on that fourth play, I'd get on a rush (winning streak) and I'd more than make up for those first three losses. I mean, I'd be playing so fast and winning so many hands when I was rushing that I'd literally break every player in the game. It's because whenever I hold a bunch of hands, I usually get action on them.

I've never won a bunch of pots on the bank (watching the other guys play). If I'm striking (making a bunch of hands) ... I'm in there I'm not on the side. **If you're going to have a rush…you've got to let yourself have one.** You've got to sustain that rush. And to do that, you've got to get in there and play.

After I've won a pot in No Limit ... I'm in the next pot regardless of what two cards I pick up. And if I win that one ... I'm always in the next one. I keep playing every pot until I lose one. And, in all those pots, I gamble more than I normally would.
If you don't play that way ... you'll never have much of a rush. I know that scientists don't believe in rushes ... but they make about fifteen hundred a month. I've played Poker for almost 25 years now ... and I've made millions at it. A big part of my winnings came from playing my rushes.

There's only one world class Poker player that I know of who doesn't believe in rushes. Well, he's wrong ... and so are the "scientists". Besides, how many of them can play Poker anyway?

If you want to take the money off ... I mean, make a big score ... then, you've got to play your rushes. It's that simple.

At this point, you should have a very good feel for my style of play. It should help you to understand and appreciate the things I'm going to say about the way I play specific hands ... from before the Flop on through each stage of play until all the cards are out.

In all the situations that I'll shortly discuss, an **important assumption** has been made. That is:

Unless otherwise noted, the way I'd play a specific hand at No Limit Hold 'em is how I'd play it in a pot against other top Poker players ... and not the way I'd play it against a weak player.
The reason that assumption has been made is because, as you already know, against a weak player (or a drunk) you have to play quite differently. All you try to do against a weak player is make the best hand and then extract from him the largest amount of money you can. Just outplay him.

Chapter Three:
Big Pairs (AA/KK) - How to Play Specific Hands

An important qualification you must be aware of before reading what follows is that the recommendations I make are how you should generally play the hands discussed That's the way I generally play them. But, you should never fall into a pattern playing Poker. I don't. I always vary my play ... I try to mix it up as much as I can. I never consistently repeat my action on any hand. I don't play like a computer that's programmed to do the same routine over and over again. The high quality of players I play against on a regular basis would easily detect a pattern to my play if there was any. So I never do the same thing with the same hand from the same position against the same player. I'm always changing speeds during the course of a game.

However, for your purposes, my playing recommendations for a particular hand are a good way for you to play them ... until your opponents learn your style. When they do ... you start shifting gears up and down continuously until there is no noticeable pattern.

I'm going to break the game down into four major - and very broad - categories as follows:

I. PAIRS
II. SMALL CONNECTING CARDS
III. BORDERLINE HANDS
IV. TRASH HANDS

How to play your hand when you have a Pair in the pocket is going to be discussed first. That category will be sub divided and discussed as follows:

a. Big Pairs A A, K K and A K
b. Q-Q
c. J J down to 2 2

I've grouped an Ace King with a Pair of Aces and a Pair of Kings because it's a very strong hand. As you'll learn, I would rather have A K than A A or K K.

I'll discuss each of the hands as I'd play them in a nine handed game from an early position (first three seats), middle position (next three seats) and late position (last three seats). A medium ante game is assumed (unless otherwise noted).

A A and K K how to play before the Flop

With a Pair of Aces or Kings in an early position before the Flop. . .I would probably limp in with them (just call the Blind) hoping that somebody would raise it behind me so I could re raise.

In a middle position if nobody in the early seats came in I would play them the same way. But, if somebody in the early seats did come in ... I'd put in a raise with them (of about the size of the pot).

In a late position, I'd obviously raise with them and hope that somebody trailed their hand around to me that is, slow-played their hand so they could re raise me. If they did I'd play back, of course, and might move in depending on the circumstances. If I did play back and got about half my money in the pot before the Flop with two Aces or two kings ... there'd be no question that I'd get the rest of it in on the Flop regardless of what came on the turn. Nothing could stop me. If my opponent didn't set me in on the Flop ... I'd move it all in myself. The reason I'd do that is because there are too many ways I could outguess myself... and I'm not going to try. If I get either of those big Pairs cracked ... well, I'm just going to have to lose my money.

Conversely, a rare situation could exist where you'd consider throwing away two Kings before the Flop when you got raised. It's a hard hand to get away from…but if a real tight player moved in on you a player you know to be so tight that he wouldn't make that kind of play unless he had two Aces then, you might want to throw them away. Of course, you'd have to be almost certain about your man before you'd do that. One way I make this rare decision is to put myself in my opponent's position. I ask myself if I'd re raise (if I were him) with two Queens (or less). If the answer is NO ... I'd throw the two Kings away.

I'm going to discuss how to play a big Pair on the Flop in a moment. But, this is a good point to note that when you have two Kings and there's a single Ace on the Flop ... it's complete judgement as to whether or not you should go on with your hand. If you put your opponent on an Ace* ... that's the end of the pot right there. If not ... you play your two Kings as if you had the best hand.

A A and K K how to play on the Flop

Regardless of the hand you have, the Flop is where you'll make your most crucial decisions. It's **THE** key point in the hand. It's where you put people on hands ... decide what they've probably got. Usually, everything after the Flop is more or less cut and dried.

***There's a lot of very interesting facts on Hold 'em probabilities In the Appendix. Particularly relevant here are the following two facts:**

1. **In a nine handed game, when you have two Kings, the probability that no other player has an Ace is about 20% ... or, a player will have**

an Ace about 80% of the time. (See "Hold 'em Absence of Aces before the Flop ... by numbers of players.')

2. **Also, an Ace (with two unpaired cards less then Kings) will flop about 18% of the time. (See "Hold 'em Flops for selected hands: Selection B.')**

Of course, you put people on hands before the Flop, too ... but, on the Flop, you're in a much better position to determine what a man probably has by the way he calls - whether he's drawing to a Straight or Flush and so forth.

I play a Pair of Aces or Kings very cautiously from an early position when there's three cards that'll make a Straight or a Flush on the Flop. This is especially true if there are two or more people in the pot with me. The guys that called behind me are liable to have anything. In that position, they've either got a hand that could break me ... or I'll win a very small pot if I bet. So, in an early position, a bell rings (reminding me not to bet) when I see three to a Straight or Flush on the Flop when I've got Aces or King in the pocket. Consequently, I immediately start playing that hand slow ... and usually I just check in a front position.

Now, if I'm in a late seat ... and somebody had trailed in in the early seats ... I might go ahead and bet once. If I got called ... I would immediately become defensive again with that hand. Anytime there's three cards to a Straight or Flush, I play the hand with extreme caution.

The quality of the possible Straight that's out there also has a big influence on the way I'd play that big Pair. If it came 9 8 7, 10 9 8 or J 10 9 and I've got two people in the pot with me...I immediately give it up. Almost any two cards that those two people have will fit into those Flops somehow. They're either going to have a hand that's already got me beat or they're going to have a hand to draw at that would make my hand no better than even money shot.

If it comes 10 9 8 and one of them's got a Q J ... then, he's got the Straight made. If he's got a J 10 ... then, he's got a Pair with an open end Straight draw. He could catch a Seven, a Ten, a jack or a Queen. Anyone of those cards will beat me. There are 13 of them* in the deck and he's got two shots at them. That makes his hand as good as mine at that point he's almost exactly even money to beat me so I don't want to put myself in jeopardy and get myself in a position where I could get broke.

***4 Sevens, 4 Queens, 3 Jacks and 2 Tens.**

I don't always give up the pot in that situation. I just play extremely cautiously. That is, I don't charge… and try to win the pot right there.

If just a J 10 falls say the Flop is a J 10 2 well, there I'd really play my two Aces because any combination of big cards would give my opponent some kind of

hand. A King Queen will give him an open end Straight draw ... an A K will give him two overcards and a belly Straight draw ... an A J, K J, Q J, A 10, Q 10, or K 10 will give him a Pair so I'd go ahead and play my two Aces in that situation. If he's got jacks and Tens (or better) ... well, more power to him because he's got a hand with which he can win a big pot from me.

If you know your player ... you'll be able to figure out what hand he's likely to have. You have to use common logic in putting your opponent on a hand.

I'm not as leery of a three card Flush on the Flop as I am a three card Straight. There's not as many possible hands that could beat you ... although a guy could have a Pair and a Flush draw if he's in there with you.

The first thing I'd do would be to see if either one of my two Aces (or Kings) matched the cards out there. If three Hearts fell ... and I had two red Aces ... I would immediately play that hand. It's a big hand. But if I had the two black Aces or didn't have the Ah ... I might be a little more hesitant to play it.

As I said, if I had the Ah ... I'd play the hand fast on the Flop. If I get called ... I'm in a position to win it anyway. I know where the nuts are.

That's one of the most important things about No Limit Hold 'em. If you can avoid it ... you never want to get your money in dead.

You don't want to he drawing for a Flush when there's a Pair on the Board. A man could have a Full house. And, you don't want to be drawing to a Straight when another man could have a Flush. If the Board comes three Hearts and you've got an open end Straight draw you don't draw at that Straight. You throw your hand away. All the top players try to keep from ever getting their money in completely dead.

If there's a Pair and a Rag on the Flop ... and I had a Pair of Aces or Kings in the pocket ... I'd bet at that pot from an early position. If I got called ... then, I'd proceed cautiously. I mean, when the next card was turned ... I'd check it to him. If he bet ... maybe I'd call it or maybe I wouldn't. It would depend on what I felt that he had. I mean, I'd know he's got something that he likes.

For example, if the turn is 6 6 2 and I bet and he calls ... he's telling me he's got some kind of hand. He's probably got a Pair in the pocket (anywhere from Sevens to Tens) or else he's got a Six or 3 Deuces. So, I'd use my judgement at that point ... and I'd be cautious again. If there were a couple of players in the pot in front of me and one of them turned a Set (of Sixes) he'd probably check it to me. That's what most players do in that situation. They check a Set into the raiser. But, as you know, that's the wrong way to play it. A player would know the right thing to do is to lead into you.

If it was checked to me and there wasn't a Straight draw on the Board (say the Flop was 7 7 2) I might check it also ... and give a free card. I'd do that for two reasons:

1. If he didn't have a hand, I'd want him to help his hand enough to continue playing. For example, if a jack or Queen fell off on Fourth St., it might pair him.
2. Another reason I'd check would be to eliminate the possibility that I'd get broke if he does have a Seven.

But, if the Flop was 6 6 2 ... I would bet ... because I wouldn't want a Three, four or Five falling off and making somebody a Straight.

In brief ... you don't give free cards where that free card could break you. If there's a possible Straight or Flush draw on Board ... you don't give a free card.

A Flop that's 6 6 5 is a lot different (because there's a Straight draw) than one that's 6 6 K. If I had two Aces with the latter Flop and it was checked to me ... I'd probably check it back. If he's got a King ... he's going to play it on the Turn (Fourth St.) because you've made him think he's got the best hand when you check plus, if he does have a Six, as before, you might be able to hold your losses to a minimum.

What it all boils down to is that with a Pair of Aces or Kings ... you're waiting until you get kind of a cinch hand before you really play a big pot. You're not looking to play a big pot where you might have only a small percentage the best of it or one where you're a big underdog.

In general, with those big Pairs on the Flop ... you play them a little more aggressively from a late position than from an early position. Also, you shouldn't be concerned that someone might be checking the nuts to you (such as 3 Sixes in the examples used). You never worry about that. I've heard people say: "Well, I was afraid to bet because I was afraid he'd raise me." Never worry about getting raised. You have to go ahead and play and if it happens, it happens... and then you worry about it. Don't cross that bridge until you come to it.

You can't play winning Poker by playing safe all the time. You must take chances ... gamble. And you have to feel aggressive to play aggressively. That's my style of Poker. And it's a winning style.

I've re stated my general philosophy of play at this point because I'm discussing the play of a Pair of Aces or Kings in the hole. In most cases, I play them slowly (not slow play them). That is, I play them cautiously. This is contrary (to my general style of play and) to the way most people play them. Most players feel that they're so hard to come by that when they do get them

they want to win a big pot with them. So they play them real fast. That's usually wrong. (But, there are exceptions I'll soon discuss.)

The fact is, with a Pair of Aces or Kings ... one of two things will usually happen. Either:

1. **You'll win a small pot**

   or

2. **You'll lose a big pot**

The reason the above is so is because a player is not going to get a lot of money in the pot unless he can beat your big Pair or when he has a Straight or Flush draw. In the latter case, as you'll soon see, I'm going to make him pay to draw to his hand.

Another time I play two Aces or Kings slowly is in the rare instance a Set of Trips flops say, 3 Sevens or 3 jacks. But, this time I do it for somewhat different reasons. Now ... I want someone in the pot with me to catch up (improve his hand). So I check it ... but, just one time. I Want to give them a free card so they can catch a Pair ... or give them a chance to bluff at it.

It's tough to win anything in that spot by leading off ... unless you catch somebody with a Pair in the pocket.

Of course, there's a small chance you could run into a Set of Fours. But, anyone who made that hand will "let you know" they made it by the way they put all their money in the pot. It takes experience to recognize something like that ... but it's just like any other situation where somebody's betting the pure nuts at you. You have to use judgement to evaluate it. After a while, you recognize it. As always ... it boils back down to people.

The one situation where I stand to lose a very big pot with a Pair of Aces (or Kings) is when there's two to a Straight or Flush on the Flop. For example, there's a J 10 2 out there. If somebody bet at me ... I'd move in a lot of chips. I could win the pot right there. If not ... they're really going to pay to draw to their hand. If I was first to act, I'd check ... hoping I'd get to raise it. (It's one of the few times I check raise.)

If I get called, I'll probably put my opponent on a Straight (or Flush) draw. And, of course, on Fourth St. I'll go ahead and bet again if a Blank (meaningless card) fell.

Again, a lot of judgement's involved ... because my opponent might have been fortunate enough to make some kind of hand that would beat my two Aces

(such as Jacks and Tens). In that case, I'd go ahead and pay him off... because, as I said earlier, I'm not going to try to out guess myself.

If the Board fell completely ragged, say a 10 6 5, I would bet from any position. As in all the hands I discussed, there's always the chance that someone could've turned a Set. But, again, I'm going to cross that bridge if and when I come to it.

In this situation, I'd know if my big Pair was beat... especially if I had raised with my hand from an early position before the Flop. All good Hold 'em players would interpret that as a sign of strength. I mean, the first thing you usually give a man (credit for) when he raises (especially the weaker players) is a big Pair.

So if it comes a 10 6 5 (and I had raised from an early position) ... the other players will think that I have a strong hand possibly a big Pair, which I've actually got. Then ... when I bet on the Flop and get raised by somebody in a late position ... it gets back to people again. You've just got to know your players. He's representing to you that he can beat a big Pair. If he's a good, solid type player ... what else can he have besides a Set of Trips or, possibly, Two Pair? So, you make up your mind right there whether or not to go ahead with your two Aces (or two Kings).

Of course, it's possible that he could have a Pair of Queens or jacks in a back position and didn't raise you before the Flop ... and, now, on the Flop (because he's got an overpair) he's decided to test you. Then, you might want to call his raise one time ... if it's not too big a bet. The next time, you check it to him and see what he does. If he bets again ... he's usually there.

Up to now, I've discussed how I'd play a Pair of Aces or Kings on the Flop assuming I didn't turn anything that helped my hand. Now, I'll discuss the situations where I get some help.

If I turn a Set ... I never slow play it (with the exception of a situation I'll soon discuss). I almost always come right out and bet ... and I don't make just a nominal bet. I make an extra large bet because the only way you'll win a big pot is when somebody else turns something with you ... or puts you on a bluff…or tries to run you down. So ... I really come out smokin' right there.

You might remember the point I made earlier that "when you have a Pair of Aces and a single Ace flops (giving you a Set of Trips) ... there'll always be the possibility that the next card off could make someone a Straight". The reason why that's so can be seen in the examples below.

FLOP A

With a single Ace on the Flop and any card Five or under ... there's always a draw to a Five high Straight. As in FLOP A ... if a Deuce, Trey or Five fell on Fourth St. it could make someone a small Straight.

The same thing applies whenever there's a single Ace on the Flop with any card Ten or above.

FLOP B

With FLOP B ... a King, Queen or Ten on Fourth would mean someone might have made an Ace high Straight.

If there's no draw to a Straight that includes an Ace, then there'll be a draw to a medium Straight because there'd have to be a two card combination of the other four cards ... namely, a Six, Seven, Eight or Nine (an example of which is below).

FLOP C

The Straight possibility is more obvious with something like FLOP C because there are seven different Straights that can be made. (If anyone has a J 10, J 8, 10 8, 10 6, 8 6, 8 5 or a 6 5 ... they could make a Straight with the next card off.)

You should always keep this interesting discovery in mind whenever you see what appears to be a raggedy Flop with an Ace in it. The threat that someone could make a Straight will always be present.

So when you flop a Set of Aces, you immediately go to betting and you bet a large amount to prevent somebody from drawing at an inside Straight

cheaply. A good player will know it's worth it to take a cheap draw at a bellyStraight ... and, if he makes it, he can break you.

However, if you flop a Set with two Kings ... you could possibly give a free card when it comes ragged where there's no Straight or Flush draw. For example, say a K 8 2 falls. Now, you can give a card with that Flop because you'd have the nuts if any card other than an Ace, Eight or Deuce fell. An Ace might give someone 3 Aces and an Eight or Deuce could possibly make someone Four of a kind. Since you don't realistically worry about a Set of Fours ... you really want an Eight or Deuce to hit the Board on Fourth St.

In the rare instance when you turn a Set of Fours (say, four Aces) you're happy to have them ... but you really don't have a very profitable hand. You've got the deck crippled. There's nothing left that your opponents can have. (The situation illustrated is so rare that you might not see four Aces get beaten like that in a lifetime of playing Hold 'em.)

So, when you turn a hand that big, you just have to check along and maybe try to win a small bet on the end. Or if you're extremely fortunate you might get somebody to try to bluff at it. They just might try to pick up the pot by representing your hand. You could get lucky that way. But, most of the time, you just play it very slow and take what you can get ... meaning that you always bet on the end from any position.

Another time I would almost always check it is when I flopped the big Full (the highest possible Full House). And, that's what you would have with two Aces if the Flop was A 3 3 or with two Kings if it came K 7 7.* You'd have some leverage then so you could give them a free card. (There's an exception to giving a free card which I'll discuss shortly.) After you check it once ... you then bet on Fourth ... hoping that somebody hit something there.

***With an Ace (or Aces) on the Board you might not have the big Full with a Pair of Kings.**

Whenever you've got a hand that's so big you've got the deck crippled or one that's very unlikely to get beaten ... you should play it very slow on the Flop for two reasons:

1. **First, you want to give your opponents a chance to bluff; and**
2. **You want to give them a chance to catch something if they don't bluff.**

With a Pair of Aces or Kings, there's a chance you could flop a Straight or Flush draw. It would almost always be a gutshot Straight draw (with the exception of a Q J 10 when you had Kings). In any case, if I flopped a Straight draw, I'd be cautious with my hand. You're probably beat at that point

because any Flop that would give you a Straight draw could easily make your opponent Two Pair. I wouldn't fool with that hand.

But, if I've got the two red Aces and three Diamonds flop ... well, as I noted earlier, that's a very big hand. I'd play that hand from the hip ... and I'd be willing to put all my money in with it.

You should always remember that the Flop is practically the whole game in Hold 'em. That's where your major decisions will be made. The play on Fourth St. and Fifth St. is pretty basic.
For example, on the Flop, you put your opponent(s) on a particular hand. And, all your thinking follows from that. If you think he's drawing at a Club Flush ... you bet. You must make your opponents pay to make their draws. If the Club doesn't come on Fourth St. you bet again. Obviously, if the Club comes ... you check it if you think your opponent made his hand.
If you think you're beat, naturally, you check it ... and if you think your opponent's drawing ... you bet. That's the whole thing.
On the end (Fifth St.), if it looks like your opponent has missed his hand ... there's usually no reason to bet any further. So you just show your hand over. . or you check it and give him a chance to bluff.

That's No Limit Hold 'em in a nutshell. ...but, as you know, it's a far more complex game than that.

A-A and K-K: How to play on Fourth and Fifth

So far I've given you **general** guidelines on how to play a Pair of Aces or Kings before and on the Flop. I'll continue to discuss the play of those big Pairs in the latter stages of action (Fourth and Fifth Sts.). Later, I'll also discuss how I'd play various other hands at the different betting points.

But, when you read the discussions you should always be aware that my advice is of a general nature. I keep re emphasizing this because it's so important that you understand it. There's not a single play I make that's of an absolute nature. I mean ... there's no play that I'll make with a particular hand. Every hand I play is subject to be played differently depending on the circumstances at the time. The standards I have the ones you've read (and will read) generally guide me (as they should you). But, sometimes, even I don't know exactly what I'm going to do until the situation comes up. Whatever my first feeling (impression) is at the time I'd go with that.
For example, I said I'd check my Pair of Aces (one time) if there was an open Set of Trips on the Flop. On Fourth St., if a man made a big bet or if I bet and he moved in on me ... I'd probably go ahead and pay him off. If a man's lucky enough to flop a Set of Fours when I've got two Aces ... he'd have to show me the fourth one unless I've got a lot of money in front of me and there's not too much money in the pot.

I'll put some numbers on what I'm talking about so it'll be more clearly defined. However, even what I say now I might not do (or do just the opposite) at a particular time. It would depend. On a lot of things. Especially the guy in the pot with me. What do I know about him? So it's back to people again. Nevertheless, here's what I **might** do.

Let's say there's $20,000 in the pot. I've got $70,000 on the table. My opponent's got $20,000 ... and he moves in on me. In that case, I'd probably pay him off ... if I knew him to be a Player (as opposed to a Rock). However, if my opponent also had $70,000 and overbet the pot by moving in his entire stack ... well, then I'm not sure what I'd do. As I said, I'd go with my feelings. I'd look at him ... and then I'd decide.

To start with ... if he made a move like that ... I'd turn my hand face up on the Board. And I'd watch him real close. I'd want to see what his reaction was when I turned the two Aces up. It would take a strong man not to show some kind of emotion. And from the emotion I saw, I'd judge whether he had a Set of Fours or not. Then I'd react according to whichever way I felt.

As I noted, you continue to bet your big Pair on Fourth St. when it rags off and it doesn't look like it completed the Straight or Flush draw that showed on the Flop. If your opponent(s) want to draw again ... you make them pay for it.

In the situation where you flopped a Set, you should also continue to bet on Fourth even if it does look like someone could've completed a Straight. You can't worry about it because you don't know which Straight it is (and if it was made at all). Just disregard any Straight card ... and go ahead and bet.

But, if a third Flush card fell on Fourth ... then I'd probably check it. If someone bet ... I'd call it. I'd be thinking that I was probably beat ... but I'd be trying to make a Full. I mean, I wouldn't know for sure that I was beat ... but I'd call knowing there was a strong possibility I was. And I'd call a pretty big bet.

If the man moved all in on me in that spot, I'd probably give him credit for the Flush. Then it would be simple mathematics whether or not a call was justified. There'd be ten cards out of the 45 left that would help my hand.* That means it's 35 to 10 (or 31/2 to 1) that I don't improve my hand. If the pot's laying me more than 3 1/2 to 1 ... I'd call. If not ... I'd throw my hand away.

Of course, the above math only applies when you feel very strongly that your opponent has the Flush made. If you thought you could have the hand wrong where the man might have the second (highest) Set of Trips (or some other hand) then, you might call if the pot was laying you only 3 to 1. You could accept a smaller price because you have some doubts.

So much depends on your judgement in situations like that. This is especially true on the end (Fifth St.). If I didn't make my Full there ... it would be complete judgement if I was forced to call another bet.

***The case (last) Ace is assumed to be still In the deck and so are three each of the other three cards on the Board that could pair and make my Full.**

When I discussed how I'd play my big Pair when I flopped a Full , I said I'd almost always check it. The exception would be when two of the cards on the Flop were suited (or maybe even two to a Straight). In that case, I would not check on the Flop. I would bet. I'd be trying to get a man in there drawing to a Flush and hoping that he'd make it so I could break him. And, if a Flush card did come on Fourth St. I'd make a big bet ... expecting to be raised ... hoping to be raised.

I'd play the hand similarly if I had flopped a Set and the Board paired on the end making my Full and at the same time making a possible Flush for somebody. Whenever you've got a Full and a three Flush comes, it's **exactly** the situation you're looking for. You go ahead and bet even an extraordinarily big bet and you can break your opponent. (You should not, by the way, bet as much with a three card Straight out there because your opponent may not have the nut Straight. He may even be drawing. So, in either case, if you've got him dead ... you'd want him to play his Straight if he made it or you want him to draw at it ... and a very big bet might scare him off.)

In the case where you flopped a Set and the Board pairs on Fourth or Fifth ... but there's no possible Straight or Flush out there (say the Board is As, 6h Jc Jd) ... you should lead with your Full. Don't slow play it. In fact, you should make a big bet (bigger than the size of the pot).

There's a good possibility that your opponent was calling you on the Flop with the Second Button (or possibly the Third Button). So, when the Board paired, it might've made him a strong hand… and you'd be in a position to break him. He'd probably play back if he made Trips when the Board paired. Also, knowing your aggressive style of play, he might think you're trying to represent his hand ... and you might get a good play because of that.

But, if a Flush draw was out there on the Flop and the Pair on Fourth didn't complete the Flush ... well, then I'd make a small bet (smaller than the size of the pot). I want him to call so he'd have an opportunity to make the Flush on the last card.

The situations I've been discussing are those where you've made a very big hand with your two Aces or Kings ... and the way you should play it in order to extract the most you can from your opponent(s). It's more likely that you won't make a big hand and will have to play a Pair of Aces or Kings very carefully in certain instances on Fourth and Fifth Sts.

For example, if there were three Rags on the Flop and then the Board paired on Fourth or Fifth ... I'd definitely slow down. This is not the same situation as when a Pair came on the Flop. When the Pair shows after the Flop, the possibility is much stronger that it helped your opponent there. He's already called you on the Flop ... indicating that his cards fit into the community cards. His call clearly meant that he had something a Pair or some kind of draw. So, I'd be cautious again in that situation.

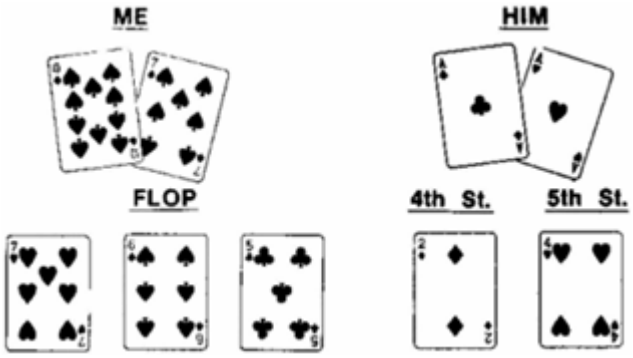
It's a somewhat different situation when there are four Rags out there and the Board pairs on Fifth St. Exactly what I'd do would depend on whether I bet the two previous times (on the Flop and on Fourth) ... and on which card was paired. If the top card (and possibly the second card) paired ... I'd suspect I might be beat. They'd be the two most dangerous Pairs. If the Third, or Fourth Button paired ... I wouldn't be concerned if I had bet on the Flop and on Fourth St.

Another time you should not be at all concerned is when the Flop is, say, 8 8 5 and then the third Eight falls on Fourth (or on the end). You just don't worry about a Set of Fours ... so actually your hand got stronger on Fourth St. Before the third Eight showed, there was the nagging possibility your opponent had Trips. That's far less likely now ... and he's probably in there with an overpair.

A very tough situation could exist on Fifth when there's four to a Flush (or Straight)...and you don't have any of it. With a big Pair in that spot, it's back to judgement again. You have to evaluate what you think your opponent was drawing at ... and whether or not he's got one of the cards that would complete the Straight or Flush.

You should never bet in that situation. If he's first and he checks ... you just show it down. If you were first, you'd check it. If he bet ... well, you're back to people. You'd just have to evaluate your player.

That situation brings to mind a play I often make. I've played a lot of pots against tight players when I've made a very weak call on Fourth St. hoping the last card will make a four card Straight or Flush on the Board so I could represent the Straight or Flush by making a big bet. For example, my (tight) opponent has raised before the Flop and I feel he has a big Pair in the pocket. The situation might look like this:



My opponent bets on the Flop and I call. The next card is the 2d and if my opponent bets again, I'll call not because I think I have the best hand ... but because of the tremendous bluffing opportunity I'll have if the last card is a 3, 4, 8 or 9. Either one of those four cards will mean the Board is one card off of a Straight. I'll almost certainly win the pot if I make a substantial bet on the end (representing the Straight) if, as in the example, a Four fell on Fifth. I might also catch a Ten or Seven on the end. I'd win a nice pot in that case, too ... so I'm justified in calling on Fourth St. I do a lot of gambling like that on Fourth and on the end. And they're good gambles because I know a tight player wouldn't jeopardize all his money when one card would beat him.

It's not only tough for a tight player to make a call for all his money in a situation like that ... it's tough for anyone to do it. But, if you know your player ... it does make it easier. If the Straight or Flush is a back door job (made on Fourth and Fifth Sts.), then you may want to reconstruct the play of the entire hand and try to determine whether it's logical that that particular player would go as far as he did to make the hand. Of course, a lot of times a player will literally back into a hand like that. For example, he may have started with a small pair on the Flop and he might have picked up a Straight or Flush draw on Fourth. And he got there on the end without really trying.

With two Aces or Kings, you're going to have to use a lot of judgement when all the cards are out and your hand never got better. You'd have to go back to what you originally felt your opponent was drawing at on the Flop and on Fourth St. If you thought he made what he was drawing at on the last card ... well, obviously, you'd check it whether you were first or last to act. If you thought he was drawing at a hand and completely missed it ... and you were first you'd still check. But, this time, you'd be doing it to give him an opportunity to bluff at it. If you were last and it looked like he missed his hand and he checked it to you ... you'd just turn your hand over to avoid being wrong in your judgement. He's not going to call you if he missed his draw. But, if you put him on the wrong hand to begin with ... you could get raised.

Chapter Three:
A-K How to play before the Flop

I've already mentioned that I'd rather have Ace King than either a Pair of Aces or a Pair of Kings. A lot of players will probably find that surprising. But it's not. You'll soon see why.

Of course, I know that an A K would never outrun A A or K K if you played them against one another hot and cold. An A K couldn't even beat a Pair of Deuces. I know. On a proposition bet, I once took the Deuces and two other guys took the A K. The proposition was to play the two hands against one another hot and cold. We simply dealt out five cards to see which hand would win more times. It was an even money proposition ... and we bet $500 a hand. I won several thousand dollars before they quit.

They weren't convinced the first time because we did it two or three different times. They'd lose some money...and then they'd quit. They'd go away ... Come back (after doing some "homework") and then we'd do it again. And I'd beat them again.

But, I'm not talking about playing *hot and cold* here. Now ... I'm talking about playing Poker.

An A K is a "better" hand than two Aces or two Kings for two very important reasons:

1. **You'll win more money when you make a hand with it; and**
2. **You'll lose less money when you miss a hand with it.**

And I can't think of two better reasons than those to prefer an A K over the very big Pairs.

The reason why you can make more money with an A K than with two Aces (or Kings) is because it's a drawing type of hand as opposed to a made hand. I mean, you don't have anything with an A K unless you flop something. So you can get away from it real easy. You're not tied on to it like you might be with a Pair of Aces (or Kings). And that's why you'll lose less money with it.

Another reason why you can make more and lose less with A K than with the very big Pairs is because when you have A K and you pair the Ace or King on the Flop ... it's much harder for your opponent to make his hand if he's playing something like two connecting cards. For example, if someone's playing a 7 6 and the Board comes A 9 8, he hasn't made anything yet...because when you pair one of your hole cards there can be only two cards that'll help him.* But, if you had two Aces in the pocket ... the Board

could come 9 8 5 or any three cards that could help his hand (such as a Pair and a draw). That one extra card considerably improves his chances of cracking your Aces.

***The exception to this would be when the Flop is three to a big Straight with maybe two to a Flush, like: As Jh 10s or Kd Jd 10c ... and the Ace or King helps both you and your opponent.**

Ace King is also a more flexible hand (in the way you can play it) as you'll soon see.
There's also a big difference between A K suited and A K offsuit. (Any time the cards are suited it's a somewhat stronger hand than when they're offsuit. This is especially true with A K because you can make the nut Flush.) The big difference between the two hands is that it only takes three cards to make a Flush with A K suited. True, you can make one of two Flushes with A K offsuit ... but it takes four cards to make either one. That's a lot harder to do. And, with one of them (the Flush you might make with the King), you may not have the nuts.
In the discussion to follow, the difference between the two hands is sometimes ignored. That is, I'm going to suggest playing them the same way. But, you should always remember that A K suited has more value than A K offsuit...and it can always be played a little stronger.
The reason why A K is more flexible than A A or K K is because you can play an A K in the lead or you can play it slow to raise with it. Also, I'd play A K from any position for a reasonable size bet. And, on occasion, I'd get all my money in before the Flop (as I'll very shortly discuss).

Specifically, in an early position, I'd bring it in (raise the Blind) for whatever the normal bring in was for that particular game. If I was raised, I'd probably call ... although I don't like to call a raise with A K (as most players do). I like to raise with it.

If I was in a middle position and someone else had brought it in...I'd just call with it. I wouldn't raise because I'd probably be raising just one man. I'd want at least another player to come in.

In a late position, I'd probably raise with it especially if I was on the Button.

There are times I might even move all in with an A K. Let's say I brought it in in an early position and a couple of people behind me just called. When it gets to the guy on the Button...he raises. Well ... if he did that, I'd think he was trying to pick up the pot since he'd probably think the only person he had to come through (worry about) was me since the two people behind me showed weakness. So I might move in in that situation.

Or, if I was on the Button, and three or four people were already in the pot ... I might move all in. At that point, I'd be trying to pick the pot up ... even though I'd know if I got called I'd probably be an underdog.

A K how to play on the Flop

As long as I don't help my A K on the Flop, I'm going to play the hand the same way ... regardless of whether or not the Flop might've helped someone else. For example, if three Rags flopped ... or a Pair ... or three to a Straight or Flush ... or anything that did not help my hand the way I play A K is quite simple. Barring the exception I'll soon note, here's what I'd do.

If I was the bettor to start with ... or if I was the raiser I'd bet from any position. If I called with A K I'd check ... or if there was a bet in front of me I'd pass.
As I've already said, I play (almost) all my hands that way because if I was the bettor or raiser before the Flop then I've represented a hand. So, I'll bet on the Flop regardless of what comes. I'll do it nine times out of ten.

You might have noticed that this is quite different from the way I'd play two Aces or two Kings. With either of those Pairs in an early position, I'd cheek it if there were three to a Straight or Flush on the Turn. Remember ... I "hear" a bell ringing in that situation that reminds me not to bet. So, if I've got a hand (a Pair in the pocket) ... I play it slow. But, if I'm bluffing ... I go ahead and play it fast. I mean ... I'll take one shot at it.

The reason I do that is because I know for sure I'm not going to go any further with an A K if somebody plays back at me. With two Aces or two Kings if somebody plays back it puts me to a decision. But, when I have nothing, I can bet A K with confidence because I'm gone if I get raised. I just throw my hand away because there's nothing for me to think about. Now you can see why you're less likely to lose a big pot with A K than with two Aces or two Kings.

When I do go ahead and play the hand (when there's nothing on the Flop that'll help me), I'll make a reasonable bet somewhere in the neighborhood of the size of the pot. But, as always, there are exceptions. In an unusual situation, I'd revert back to the same philosophy I use with Aces and Kings. For example, if the Fall was a Jh 10h 9h ... I'd never bluff. I wouldn't even fool with the pot if only two of those cards were suited. You know somebody's going to have something. Here again, you have to use your judgement. It's an extreme situation.

That also explains why I'll bet on the Flop 90% of the time (and not all the time) if I played my hand strong before the Flop. There are times when you know somebody must have flopped something. And bluffing at a pot in that situation will rarely succeed. So you just give it up.

If I get some help on the Flop (by catching an Ace or a King), I'd make a reasonable bet at the pot from any position. The only time I might check raise in this situation is when I had called in a middle position before the Flop and the original raiser (before the Flop) was behind me.

When someone plays back at me in the above situation

I'll either move in or release my hand. It would depend on what flopped. In order for me to move in ... I'd have to put my opponent on a hand where I thought he was drawing, For example, if the Turn came Ac 10h 9h. I'd put him on a Flush draw (or maybe a Straight draw) and I'd move in. On the other hand, if it came off ragged like a Kh 8s 2d ... I might release my A K. My thinking would be that he possibly turned a Set and I might give up.

By the way, in the first situation (when the Flop was Ac 10h 9h) a man could've turned 3 Nines and he'd be in an ideal position to win a lot of money. It would look to me like he was drawing at a Straight or a Flush (or both) and if he was lucky enough to have turned a Set ... well, there's nothing magical I could do. I'd just have to go ahead and pay him off.

If a Pair of Aces or a Pair of Kings flopped (giving me Trips) and the other card is not one that'll give someone a Straight or Flush draw I might check raise with my hand, but I probably wouldn't because I like to lead with it. It's a very strong hand and as long as a Pat hand (a Straight or Flush) can't be dealt off on the next card ... you might want to give a free card in that situation so your opponent(s) would have a chance to make something on Fourth St. But, you'd only give a free card if you were last to act. If you were first to act ... you wouldn't. You should lead with that hand. If you turned Two Pair (Aces and Kings) ... you'd play them almost identically to Trips. It's almost the same hand.

The important thing to remember is that anytime there's a possible draw on the Flop ... you should almost never check you should almost always bet. In the extremely rare case when you turn a Set of Fours ... you don't have any alternative. There's nothing else left ... so you have to check it. If you bet you could catch a man with a Pair of Queens or jacks and he might accidentally pay you off. But, realistically, you check it and hope that a Ten, Jack or Queen will fall on Fourth St. and pair someone...and then you bet hoping someone will call you with a full.

If a *Q J 10* flopped (giving me the nut Straight) ... I'd lead again if I was the raiser. Only this time it would not be a reasonable bet. It would be an abnormal size bet.

I'd overbet the pot when that Turn came because somebody figures to have made something. They could've made a smaller Straight ... possibly Trips ... or Two Pair ... or a Pair and a Straight draw. That's the type of hand most

players move in with. So, you'd probably get him to bet all his money.. and he'd be almost dead.

If I was a caller (before the Flop) ... I'd also raise it with A K. I wouldn't slow play it. I'd raise because the original raiser figures to have a hand that would fit that Flop (*Q J 10*). He could have two Aces or two Kings ... or he might have 3 Queens or 3 Jacks ... or a Pair of Queens with an Ace or King kicker. He'd be subject to go all the way (to Fifth St.) if he had any one of those hands ... and he'd get all his chips in the middle.

When the Flop came like a *J 10 2* where I'd have a belly Straight draw and two overcards with an A K ... I'd call a reasonable bet. I'd really be trying to catch a Queen ... because if I caught an Ace or King, I'd have to be careful with it. It might've made someone else a stronger hand than my own say a Straight or Two Pair.

But, if you flop two of your Flush cards when you have A K suited ... you'll have a very powerful hand. At that point, you'll be a favorite over any other overpair with the exception of a Pair of Aces or Kings.

I'll lead with that hand, of course, and I'd also lead off and bet if I actually turned a Flush with A K suited. You should not check raise with your Flush because your opponent doesn't figure to have made much on the Flop. But, he might call you with one Pair ... or he might accidentally have a small Flush. It's also possible he'd think you were drawing to a Flush especially if you're an aggressive player and he might call you all the way through with just one Pair.

A-K how to play on Fourth and Fifth

The way you'd play A K on Fourth and Fifth Sts. (if you made a Pair on the Flop) is almost the same way you'd play a Pair of Aces or Kings in the pocket. If you think your opponent made the hand he was drawing at ... you check. If you don't think he made it ... you bet.

The only exception would be when you thought you had a man out kicked. That is, you might keep betting with A K if you put your opponent on a hand that's a little bit worse than yours. For example, you think he might've paired Aces (or Kings) with you ... but, he's got a smaller kicker. In this case, you'd try to sell your hand (bet the maximum amount you think he'll call). You wouldn't try as hard to sell a Pair of Aces (or Kings) in the pocket because he might've been drawing to beat them. With A K, however, there's a good chance he's got the top card (an Ace or King) paired with you ... but your sidecard (kicker) is higher.

The important point to remember when you have A K is that it's a drawing type hand where A A (or K K) isn't. It's therefore a much easier hand to get away from than the very big Pairs.

Chapter Three:
How to Play a Pair of Queens

I've put a Pair of Queens in a separate category for the simple reason that it's a particular hand that deserves special treatment. You'll soon see why.

When I get two Queens in the pocket ... I play them very carefully. I try not to play them too strongly from any position. Unless a good situation arises ... I don't want to move in before the Turn with two Queens. By a good situation, I mean that I'm in a very late position (possibly on the Button) and four people have called a raise in front of me. Here, I might try to shut them out by moving in. I'd be using the combined strength of my pair of Queens and my position.

If you're up against two Aces or two Kings with a Pair of Queens ... you're about a 41/2 to 1 underdog. And, if you're up against A K ... you're only a little better than a 6 to 5 favorite. When people go all in before the Flop...they usually have one of those three or four hands.

So, your money's in a lot of jeopardy when you get it all in before the Turn with two Queens. If you get called, you'll usually be up against A A, K K or A K ... in which case you'll be a big dog or just a small favorite. You can pick a better spot than that to get all your money in.

That's not to say two Queens don't have a certain amount of value. They do. They're a considerably better than average hand. But, for the reason I just mentioned, I seldom raise back with a Pair of Queens from any position ... unless it's an unusual situation.

But, I will raise (the Blind) a reasonable amount with two Queens from any position if nobody else raised in front of me.

In a middle position, if somebody raised in front of me ... I'd just call as I would with any Pair. I'd just call with them in a late position, too. I wouldn't re raise (except as I mentioned).

I also play two Queens very slow on the Flop. Whenever I play them ... I'm really trying to catch a third Queen.

If either an Ace or a King came on the Flop ... I'd play the hand as slowly as possible. If anybody bet with any degree of authority ... I'd probably give them the pot.

As long as an Ace or King didn't fall ... I'd play two Queens almost exactly the way I'd play two Aces or two Kings and that includes the play on Fourth and

Fifth Sts., too. So, you might want to re read the way I'd play those two hands. Excluding the times when there's an Ace or King on the Flop, the only time I'd play Queens differently from two Aces or Kings is when there's a Flush draw on the Flop. In that case, I wouldn't be eager to get all my money in. A man with a Flush draw could also have an overcard (an Ace or King). If he did ... it would make his hand practically as strong as mine. Whereas, if I had two Aces or two Kings against only a Flush draw I'd be about a 9 to 5 favorite.

Keeping these differences in mind, you can play two Queens on the Flop, Fourth and Fifth as if they were Aces or Kings. In fact, I play all Pairs in the pocket in very much the same way ... as you'll now see.

Chapter Three:
How to Play Any Pair other than Aces, Kings or Queens

I'm going to call all the Pairs from Jacks down to Deuces a small Pair (except when I name a particular Pair). However, it's obvious that the bigger the Pair is ... the more valuable it is. And that principle extends all the way down to the very small Pairs. That is, a Pair of Fours is better than a Pair of Treys for the simple reason that when the Flop is 4-3-2, if someone turned 3-Fours he'd be a huge favorite (about 22 to 1) over someone who turned 3-Treys.

I also have a breaking-point that I use in my play with a Pair of Jacks, Tens and Nines. I mentally segregate them from the other small Pairs and I play them a little stronger than the others. I do it simply because they're bigger Pairs and it's pretty easy for three Rags to fall. When that happens ... you'll have an overpair. But, if you've got two Fives or two Sixes, it's hard for a Turn to come without there being at least one overcard. And, with an overcard out there, your hand is kind of dead so you don't want to get too much money involved.

Progressively, then, each Pair is a little bit better than the others ... but I play them all as if they were a small Pair.

Before the Flop, with any of the small Pairs (except Jacks, Tens and Nines) ... I'd limp-in (call the Blind). If somebody raised it from an early or middle position ... I'd call it. I wouldn't re-raise.

I'd almost always take a Turn with any small Pair. I'd be trying to turn a Set so I could break somebody.

With a Pair of Jacks, Tens or Nines ... if somebody raised from an early position, I'd probably just call. But, if it was raised from a middle or late position ... I might re-raise with two Jacks, Tens or Nines if I felt the raiser was weak.

The reason I might do that is because (as I noted) the probability is good I'll have an overpair on the Flop. In that case, I'd play the jacks just like I'd play two Queens. The same strategy would apply.

However, I want to note a very unusual exception I make in a special situation.

One of the reasons I like to play the small Pairs from any position is because they give me an opportunity to slow-down and not appear to be

overbearingly aggressive when it might work against me. They also give me a chance to show a little respect for a particular opponent.

As you know, if I raise a pot before the Turn ... I'm going to bet on the Flop (whatever it is) about 90% of the time. So, if I raised the pot with two Nines...I'd bet on the Flop nine times out of ten.

But, let's say I'm in the pot with a guy I've been pounding on and pounding on all night long. And that guy's a real good player who I know is getting very tired of me pounding on him. I also know I've probably got him beat, But, rather than bet him out of the pot, I'm going to purposely slow-down against him. An example will best show you what I mean and I'll explain why I do it.

Let's say I raised him with two Nines before the Flop. He calls. The Turn comes 10-2-3 and he checks it. I check along. Another Rag falls off on Fourth St. He checks again. Now, I'm reasonably sure my two Nines are the best hand. But, I'm not going to bet it. I'll check along with him to show him some respect. The Board's awful looking and I'm pretty sure he doesn't have any of it. I'm also quite sure that if I bet I'm not going to get called. So I don't bet.

It has nothing to do with feeling sorry for the man ... because if I thought there was a good chance he'd call me, I'd surely bet. But, instead of pushing him out of the pot once more and getting him hotter (angrier) than he is ... I check along with him to cool him off a little.

Remember ... he's a real good player. And, although I'm quite sure he won't call me ... I'm not so sure he won't play-back and put pressure on me when I've got a hand that can't stand much pressure.

What's more, if he doesn't put some kind of play on me in this pot ... he could do it at any time. If I keep pushing him out of every pot, sooner or later he's going to stop "sticking his head up". And, I won't be able to "slap" him anymore. Then, he's going to make me guess. I don't want that. I don't want him to start getting aggressive. That's the hardest player in the world to beat - a guy who you bet at and who's always playing - back at you. That's exactly the kind of opponent(s) I don't want to play against. I want all my opponents to be docile.

So it kind of cools him out when I just show down a hand. He knows that I know my two Nines are the best hand. But, by not betting them, I show him some respect. And because I showed the hand down ... I've got him back to thinking that when I bet I'm either bluffing or I've got a hand I'm going to go with. He's back to guessing again. And that's exactly where I want him. I don't want to antagonize him to the point where he starts making me do the guessing.. It serves a lot of purposes to slow down in a situation like that.

A short time later, I might pick-up another Pair of Nines (or Tens or jacks) in a very late position (or on the Button) and I might raise with it again. Now ... he might play-back at me. If he did ... he'd get the pot. I'd give the pot to anyone who re-raised me before the Flop.

I'd never stand a re-raise when I have a small Pair before the flop. I won't take any pressure with them. If someone puts a play on me ... I throw them away.

But, if I don't get re-raised ... I'm back to my basic style of play. If I was the raiser ... I'd go ahead and bet on the Flop. Just about any Flop. If I raised with two Tens and a 7-3-2 turned ... I'd bet for sure since I've got an overpair. However, the only time my Pair is of any real value is when I flop a Set.

Nevertheless, I'd still bet (if I was the raiser) even if three overcards flopped. Even if I was sure a guy had a piece of that Flop (a bigger Pair) - and even if I was almost sure I'd get called ... I'd still bet. I'd be giving him the courtesy of a bet ... because there's an outside chance I Could pick that pot up. And it wouldn't be a small bet. It would be a reasonable bet.

He'd be looking for me to bet ... and I don't want to disappoint him. It would hurt my table-image.

I'll do that 90% of the time. In this case, I'll take one stab at the pot and if I don't get it there...I'll try to check it out from there on. An exception would be when I put a guy on a draw. In that case, he's going to have to pay to make his hand.

If I got raised ... I surely wouldn't go any further with the hand.

I play small Pairs cautiously and try to win a small Pot with them. I won't put a lot of chips in the pot unless I turn Trips. And when I don't make trips with a small Pair, whenever I bet ... I'm bluffing from there on.

If I had called a raise before the Turn ... and the raiser bet on the Turn...unless I turned a Set, I'd probably surrender the pot. That's especially true if an overcard flopped. So, right there, you can see the strength of being the raiser. He made me lay down my hand. That's why I like to be the raiser.

When you don't help your small Pair on the Flop ... the important points to remember are these:

1. **You're through with them, if you just called before the Flop ... and you don't put any more money in the pot from there on; and**
2. **If you raised with them, you should generally bet on the Flop trying to win a small pot, but, if you get called ... you don't want to bet again (on Fourth and Fifth) and you try to play showdown from that**

point on - unless you think your opponent is on a draw, in which case you continue betting; and

3. **If you get re-raised ... you throw away your hand.**

It's a different situation entirely when you turn a Set. That's what you played for. And you should play them fast. That's what I do ... in almost all cases. I don't always raise with them ... but I never check them.

Needless to say, if I was the raiser and I turned a Set ... I immediately bet right out.* As you know, I wouldn't need a Set to do that.

If I had called before the Flop ... and someone checks it to me ... and there's people behind me ... I'll always bet with a Set of Trips.

As you know , one of my favorite plays in Hold 'em is to lead right into the raiser with Trips (or even Two Pair) - especially when I think he's got a big Pair in the hole. I overbet the pot right there ... and, if the raiser has what he represented (a big Pair) - he'll almost invariably go ahead and move-in on me.

***The only exception to this would be when I was in the pot with a very week player - and he was the only opponent I had. I'd check in this case - at discussed earlier.**

You'd make that play when you've got a small Pair (say Threes) and the Flop is 10-7-3. You lead into the raiser because you think he's got an overpair in the pocket. But, a better Flop would be one with a Face-Card - say a Q-10-3. Now ... the raiser's got to have some kind of combination with a Turn like that. If he's got two Aces or two Kings ... he's got to raise you (if he's any kind of a player). If he's got A-Q ... he'll probably raise you with that, too. If he's got K-Q ... he'll probably call you. If he's got a Straight draw ... he'll call - and it's possible that he'll raise you. So, you lead right off into him. If he's fortunate enough to have your hand beat ... well, again, there's nothing magical you can do about it - you have to pay him off.

If someone had called in front of me and bets on the Flop when it comes like A-8-3 and I put him on a Pair of Aces ... I'd probably play my 3-Threes slowly. I wouldn't want to take him out of the lead.

Another time you start overbetting the pot on the Turn is when you turn the under Full. This would be when it came 9-9-4 ... and you've got 2-Fours in the pocket. Well, you start making big (not reasonable) bets right there because 'the only way you're going to win any money with your hand is when you catch somebody with a Nine ... or when you catch somebody with a big Pair and they call you or even raise you. You want to be sure there's enough money involved so you can win a big pot. And, to be sure of that, you've got to lead with your hand.

Note that you play the under Full different from the way you'd play the big Full. If you remember, the way you play the latter hand is to check on the Flop because you'd have the deck crippled. You want to give a free card then so your opponent(s) can catch-up.

Are there times when you might release a Set on the Flop- There are. But, they're rare. It's a very hard hand to turn loose.* However, here's a situation where you might possibly save some money:

You bet on the Flop. There's a man in a late position who didn't raise it before the Turn (so he's unlikely to have a big Pair in the pocket). Now...he makes a very strong play after the Turn. I mean, he moves all-in and puts your entire stack in jeopardy. At that point, you might be able to determine he's got a Set...and if you have the small Set you might be able to get away from your hand. But, it's very difficult. In a high-stakes game ... I almost never do it.

If you turn a Set in a raised pot ... it's practically impossible to get away from it. I defy anybody, anybody, to turn a Set and get away from it if the pot was raised originally.

I'll repeat that: if the pot wasn't raised ... conceivably... you could put a man on a bigger Set than you've got. But, if the pot was raised originally, (before the Flop), it's just impossible to release a Set.

If I raised it before the Flop and I turn a Set ... and a guy beats them ... well, he's going to win a real big pot from me. If we don't get it all-in on the Flop ... we'll surely be down to the Green (no chips or money left) when all the cards are out.

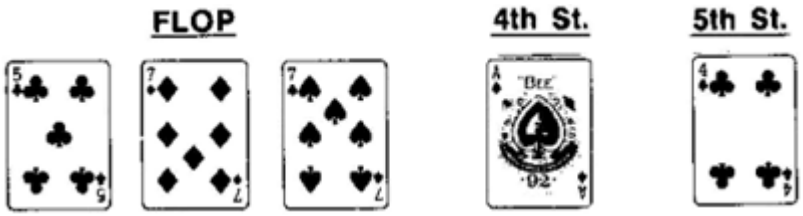
***in addition to what I say here, you might also went to re-read the discussion on this subject .**

Chapter Three:
How to Play Small Connecting Cards Before the Flop

This is the hand I'm looking for when I play No-Limit Hold 'em. Small connecting cards (suited) - the 7c-6c, 8h-7h, 5d-4d. That's the kind of hand I want. It's my favorite. And when I get it ... I want my opponent to have two Aces or two Kings and to believe (as I don't) that he should play them slow. If he holds that opinion he'll give me the opportunity to get a Turn. And if I do ... I can break him.

Exactly such a situation occurred in the 1977 World Series of Poker. It was definitely THE pot of the Tournament... bigger and more important than the pot I played with "Bones". Not only did I win it ... but I eliminated two very tough opponents. Here's what happened:

"Junior" Whited had the big Blind for $600.* Player 'X` limped-in for the six hundred. "Sailor" Roberts passed. Bones was next and he made it $3500 to go. I called ... and so did Milo Jacobson. When it got back to Junior ... he went all-in for $11,300. "X" was now looking at two raises Bones' $2900 and junior's $8400. He called. So did Bones. And so did I. Milo passed. It was a big pot already ... and destined to get bigger. The dealer got ready to turn some cards. Here's what they were:



***At this stage of the Tournament, the ante was $200 and there were Blinds of $300 and $600.**

****I'm going to keep "X" anonymous to avoid any personal embarrassment that might stem from this description because he's one of the world's very best No-Limit Hold 'em players.**

Junior was already all?in so "X" was first to act on the Flop. He moved all-in with a huge bet. Bones passed. It was up to me. 'X' could've made his move and shut me out before the Turn. He would've picked?up $26,500 had he done so. Now ... it was too late. I had him. There was no doubt in my mind about that. So I asked the dealer to count-down his bet. It was $45,400. I shoved in four and a half (20 chip) stacks of grays ($500 each) and four black ($100) chips. I was the only one who had any chips left so we all turned our hands over.

As you can see ... when all the cards were out, the pot was mine. It was the only time in the Tournament where two players were eliminated in the same pot - two very tough ones.

In order to win that $142,500 pot ... I had to gamble almost $12,000 with those small connecting cards before the Flop. I'd do it again. I always do it when there's an opportunity for me to win a real big pot.

"X"...and Junior, too ... had almost exactly the hands I thought they had. And when "X" made his move on the Turn, I was certain he had one of two hands ... the one he did have - or two Aces. He couldn't have had anything else.

If "X" had played his hand the way I recommend ... he would've won a "small" pot. As it was, he lost a big one. That's about true to form for two Aces or two Kings.

If you recall, I stated on that "*with a Pair of Aces or Kings in an early position before the Flop ... I would probably limp-in (just call the Blind) hoping that somebody would raise it behind me so I could re-raise.*" 'X' got the first part of that advice right. If he got the second part right and raised Junior,...I never would've got to play my hand.

That's the whole thing about the small connecting cards. I'll come in with them in an early or middle position. I might come in for the first bet (or, as you now know, even the second if I think I can win a real big pot). I probably won't raise with this kind of hand because I don't want to get shut out of the pot. If I raise ... and somebody else re-raises -- I probably won't be able to play it. Or, if I have to call a double-raise cold...I probably won't be able to play it there either. There are exceptions, as always....but, in general, I play the hand so I can get a Turn with it.

Small connecting cards are a hand that's not designed to put a whole lot of money in with before the Flop. It is a hand that's designed to take a lot of Flops with. You want to get a Turn with them to try to make a little Straight, a little Set of Threes, a little Two-Pair ... or something.
With any two cards to a Straight-Flush (connected or not - except for the top and bottom cards of a Straight Flush such as the 8c-4c, Jh-7h, etc.) ... I'd come in in any position. In a late position ... I'd raise with them.

I'm really looking to get raised when I come in with this hand in an early or middle position. In fact, I hope someone has a big Pair in the hole and raises behind me. Then, I can put a relatively small amount of additional money in the pot ... and, if I get a Turn - I can break him.

The beautiful part about having the small connecting cards is that if you don't get any help.. you throw them away. If the Turn comes 9-9-2, for example, you don't get involved with a 7-6. You're through.
Normally, I wouldn't want to get more than 5% (maybe, 10%) of my money involved (before the Flop) with this type of hand. If I get as much as 20% of my money in with that hand ... I'd have to be rushing. I wouldn't do it unless I was on a streak.

Also, there are times when I might raise with something like a 7-6, if I was in an early or middle position. I noted that I generally just call. And, as a rule ... that's true. But, if the tempo of the game was just right ... I'd raise in an early or middle position.

For example, if I was winning a lot of pots ... I'd do it. I said that I always play the next pot after I win a pot... regardless of what position I'm in. And when I play that pot, I usually raise it. Also, if the game had tightened down where everybody was dealing (playing) the nuts ... I'd shoot it up with a couple of small connecting cards.

Of course, you always try to keep from getting re-raised with that hand. So, the ideal situation is when you think your "muscle" will keep anyone from playing-back... and will make your opponents think you've probably got big cards or a big Pair.

The reasons I raise with the hand in a late position are because I don't think I'll get re-raised and since nobody's raised in front of me, I'll be able to give my hand some deception. And, the reasons I usually don't raise in an early position are because I'd have to go through six or seven players without getting re-raised. With a lot of top players in the game ... that's not likely. Also, I like to be in the lead - and, if I make something with it, I can take charge. So, with players behind me ... I usually call with it.

Another thing is that I don't have to maintain my table-image (of betting on the Flop when I'm the raiser). If I just called (before the Flop) and somebody else raised ... I very seldom try to pick the pot up or bluff into the raiser. The raiser commands respect. So, when I miss that hand completely when somebody else raised it...well, it's their pot. That's why I like to be the raiser.

The only reason I don't like to raise with small connecting cards is because when somebody has the hand I want them to have (a big Pair)...they're going to raise me back. That's one more reason I usually limp-in with them.

When you limp-in with this hand in an early position... you're actually playing it like you would two Aces or two Kings. So, there's also a bit of deception there. And, if somebody raises in a middle or late position ... you can pretty well put them on a hand - that is, big cards like A-K, K-Q or a big Pair. That's what you're also looking to do - you want to be able to put somebody on a hand so you know what you're trying to beat.

If you play in the style I recommend - that is, very aggressively - you'll have to adjust your play in a small game. You'll probably discover you'll get re-raised more when you raise in a small game than you will in a big game. That's been my experience. Here's why:

If I'm in a game where there's not much money on the table - say, everybody's got only $500 or $600 - and I raise it $100 ... well, a guy with big cards is going to move-in on me. They do it all the time in a small game. And when I've got a 7-6 or a 9-8 and someone bets the rest of his money at me ... I can't call it.

I'm not going to take two small connecting cards and try to beat two Kings, A-K and so forth when I can't win anything if I get a Turn. So, in a case like that, I throw my hand away.
And, because of that ... I have trouble winning in a game where there's not much money on the table.

But, it's a totally different story in a big game. If I raise it $300 or $400 ... and me and the other guy have a lot of chips on the table - well, he's a little more hesitant about raising me now because he knows there's a very good chance I'll play-back. The guys I play with know when I put my "children" out there ... I don't like to let them drown.

But, even if I do get re-raised in this situation...it's all right. In fact, it's what I want. If he raises me $700 or $800 ... and I've got small connecting cards - I'll call, now. If we've both got $25,000 in front of us ... then all I'll be putting in is about 5% of my money. And it's worth it. Because now I've got a chance to win something if I get a Turn. I might be able to break him.

I'll now discuss how I'd play this hand depending on what I flop.

How to Play Small Connecting Cards on the Flop… when you miss your hand completely

If I called in an early position with small connecting cards and I miss my hand completely ... I give the pot up.

I don't go ahead with that type of hand in that situation. I just surrender. The first loss is the best loss in a situation like that.

But, once again, if I was the raiser ... I would, of course, go ahead and bet at the pot. As long as there wasn't something "frightening" out there like the Qs-Js-10s... I'm going to bet. And, something "frightening" won't be out there 90% of the time.

If I had a 7d-6d in an early position and had decided to raise it before the Turn (when I was rushing, for example) ... and the Ah-Ac-Ks flopped ... I'd bet right out. A Flop like that wouldn't "frighten" me. Why? It's simple. My opponents don't know I don't have A-K or A-Q or K-K ... or any hand where that would be a good Flop for me. They don't know what I've got. In fact, if I raised in an early position they might think I did have a hand with big cards.

If I had raised it from a middle position before the Flop ... I'd also bet - unless someone bet in front of me. In that case ... the pot's theirs. I'd know they had something... and when I've got nothing with this kind of hand, I'm usually not going to try to make any great play (although occasionally I will bluff at it).

If I was a caller before the Flop in a middle or late position and it was checked to me on the Flop ... I'd check along. As long as I didn't make anything...it would probably have to be checked to me twice (on the Flop and Fourth St.) before I'd bet (which would be a bluff).

Of course, if I had raised it before the Turn from a late position ... I'd almost always bet - particularly if it was checked around to me. I'd bet even if the Flop was as noted before (Ah-Ac-Ks) and it was probable that someone had an Ace. The reason I'd do it is just like I discussed earlier. I don't want my opponents to get out of the habit of checking to me. Since they expect me to bet (because I was the raiser) ... I want to fulfil their expectations. So I go ahead and make a courtesy bet for them. When I make that bet, I'm trying to do two things:

(1) I'm trying to win the pot right there. And I will many a time because they get into the habit of throwing their hands away.

(2) I'm also able to maintain my aggressive image. As long as I do, they'll continue to check it to me.

That's the way I pick-up all the pots I do. Of course, if I get check-raised ... I'm out immediately. That's the risk I take. But, a guy really has to have a hand before he'll put a play on me like that. So, when he does ... I let him have the pot. But, they miss their hands more often than they make them. Because of that, I pick-up more pots than I give-up.

How to Play Small Connecting Cards on Fourth and Fifth...when you miss your hand completely

I wouldn't be in there on Fourth St. with this hand if I had nothing ... unless I was the bettor - or, if it was checked to me and I checked it with them. If someone had called my bet after having checked it to me on the Flop ... I would immediately put him on some kind of hand. If I thought he was on a drawing hand ... and it looked like he missed it on Fourth - I'd bet again. If I thought he had a made hand regardless of how weak it was (even the Third Button) I wouldn't try to make him throw away his hand on Fourth when he called me on the Flop and had, therefore, already committed himself to the pot. For example, if the Flop was a K-8-2 and I tried to pick it up, but I got called...well, then I'd try to check it out all the way through. At that point, I'd be giving up the pot at a minimum loss.

And, once again, if I thought my opponent was on a drawing hand (like two cards to a Straight-Flush) and I make another stab at the pot on Fourth ... and I get check-raised - I'm almost always going to give it up in that situation, too.

I'm never going to call a bet when I miss my hand completely. But, I might play?back at a guy who I think's putting a play on me.
As a general rule, I wouldn't make a play in that situation. However, in an extreme situation I would. If I was completely convinced a guy was trying to take the pot away from me ... I'd re-play at him. But, I'd have to feel strongly about it before I'd jeopardize a bunch of chips in that spot.

My play on Fifth St. would be just like my play on Fourth. If I'm still betting at the pot...I'd have to continue because there'd be almost no way I could win in a showdown. I mean ... all I'd have would be Seven-high (assuming I didn't pair on the end). Since I put my opponent on a draw on Fourth (and that's why I bet there) ... I'd have to feel he didn't make it when all the cards were out. I'd also have to feel very strongly he wouldn't call my last bet. Naturally, if I felt like he completed his hand ... I'd check.

You'd be in a tough spot on the end ... but you just couldn't leave all your money out there without one last stab at the pot. The key to what you'd do on Fifth is very much based on your opinion of why your opponent called you on Fourth. You'd have to feel pretty sure he was drawing ... or you could get yourself in a lot of trouble.

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.

You'll discover, if you use my system of play, that your opponents will be scared to give you (free) cards whenever they've got a hand. The reason they'll be afraid to do that is because they know you could be drawing at an inside Straight and betting with it. They know an aggressive player is liable to show them anything. Consequently... when they get a hand ... they want to shut you out right then. They bet because they don't want you in the pot

drawing at them. So there are really two good points about playing in the aggressive way I recommend:

(1) If your opponents do have a hand ... they'll show you right away. They don't want to keep giving you free cards; and

(2) Your continuous betting makes them throw away borderline hands so you can pick-up the pot when they don't have anything.

Quite simply ... an aggressive player has way the best of it.

How to Play Small Connecting Cards when you make something

I'm now going to discuss how I'd play small connecting cards when I turn something with them. The hand I'm going to use as an example throughout the discussion that follows is a 7d-6d. You'll learn how I'd play this hand in three different situations - when I get:

(1) a poor flop (slight help)

(2) a fair flop (medium help)

(3) a good flop (a lot of help)

When I've got a 7d-6d and a Qs-6h-2c falls ... I'd consider that a poor Flop to my hand. And, the way I'd play it would be very similar to what I'd do when I got no help.

However, there's a big difference in the way I'd play in this situation. It would depend on who I was involved with ... and, more importantly, how much money he had on the table. I'll gamble with the Second Button (a Pair of Sixes, in this case) - or even the Third Button - if the guy I was up against was sitting on a lot of checks. I'd do it even if I knew he had a Pair of Queens. I'd call a reasonable bet and might even put as much as 10% of my money in the pot if I thought I could break him if I got lucky and caught another Six or a Seven. I'd surely do it if I thought I could win a gigantic pot.

I might even raise. There's always a time I might raise - whether I've got a small piece of the Flop (in this case) or when I've completely missed my hand. But, those times have nothing to do with the value of my hand. I'd do it because I detected a weakness in somebody ... or because of my position. Right now, I'm discussing what I'd do based on how much value I thought my little Pair of Sixes had.

Another difference in the way I'd play this hand when I got a little help on the Flop (and no help on Fourth or Fifth) is that I'd continue to bet on Fourth if I was the original raiser. You'll recall that even if I missed this hand completely,

I'd bet it on the Flop as long as I was the raiser. But, if my bet on the Flop was called ... I'd try to check it out from then on (unless I thought my opponent was drawing).

Now, however, I'd bet again on Fourth despite the fact that my bet on the Flop was called. I don't like to keep betting when I'm on a complete bluff ... but I do like to keep betting when I've got an Out. And, I'd feel like I've got an Out because if I catch that other Six (or a Seven) ... I'd feel like I'd have a stronger hand than my opponent.

So I wouldn't show any weakness with my hand on Fourth St. I'd go ahead and make a reasonable bet.

If I still didn't get any help on Fifth St., I'd more than likely stop betting. If my opponent was drawing and he didn't make his hand ... my Pair of Sixes are probably good - so I'd check. And, if they aren't good, there's no sense in losing any more money with them.

In the case where I got some additional help on Fourth - say I caught a Seven - well, then I'd make an oversized bet (more than what's in the pot). I'm always out to win a big pot ... and now I'd have a hand to do it with. I wouldn't try to sell my hand for a small amount of money. I'd make a very big bet on Fourth ... and a very big bet on Fifth.

If I didn't catch that Seven until the end ... then I might try to sell it on Fifth St. for whatever I thought I could get.

The above way I'd play this hand when I caught a Seven on Fourth (or Fifth) assumed that I was the original raiser coming in and I stayed in the lead. That is, I continued to bet on every turn of the cards.

If I was a caller coming in and had checked and called on the Flop ... I'd play the hand differently if I caught a Seven on Fourth St. In this case, it would be another one of the few times I'd check-raise if there was a lot of money in the pot. I wouldn't want to take my opponent (the original raiser) out of the lead when I know he'd bet again on Fourth because the pot's so big ... especially since he'd have almost no idea the Seven helped me. He'd surely try to shut me out...and when he bet - I'd raise him. I'd want to win the pot right there because the Board might pair on the end (with a Queen or Deuce) and kill my Two-Pair.

The situation where I caught a Six on Fourth St. would be different still. My hand wouldn't be nearly as concealed (as it would be when I caught a Seven). The two Sixes on the Board would look very threatening. So, even if I had been a caller up to this point ... there's a good chance I'd take the lead and bet when the Six hit. And, even though the raiser could readily see that I might have 3 Sixes ... he might also think I was representing them. That, by the way,

would be a very good situation to bluff at the pot if you didn't have a Six in the hole.

Now, I'll discuss how I'd play that 7d-6d when I got what I'd call a fair Flop. Any three cards that gave me the top Pair, an open-end Straight (or a Flush) draw would be a fair Flop. But, I'd play fast only with the Straight draw.

I play Flush draws extremely slowly because they're so obvious. When there are two of the same suit on the Flop, I see so many players move-in on a guy after he bets when they're drawing to a Flush. Occasionally, I do it too... because my philosophy of play is to protect my money and bet whenever I can. But, it's usually a very obvious play. Most players will put you on a Flush draw in that situation. And for that reason I like a Straight draw better.

If I get that Straight draw ... well, I'm ready now. I mean really ready. The battle's on. If I was the original raiser ... of course, I'd bet on the Turn. If I get raised ... I'd play-back and move all my chips in. If somebody bets in front of me ... I'd raise 'em.

If I wasn't the original raiser ... this would be another time when I'd check-raise. If the guy who raised it before the Flop bet after I checked ... I'd raise with most or all of my chips. I'd be the aggressor at that point ... and nobody could take me out of the lead from then on.

As I said earlier, most decisions are made on the Flop. I mean, that's where you steal pots. So I'd play this hand that way because I'd be in a very typical situation where I steal a lot of pots. I'd be bluffing with an Out. I could win the pot right there. If I got called, I'd have a good draw (an open-end Straight which I'd make about 33% of the time) and a small chance to back-door Two-Pair or Trips.
In the case where I just turned the top Pair (when the Board was a 6-4-2 or a 7-4-2) ... I'd play it cautiously. I'm not going to fall in love with that hand...but, I'll gamble a little with it.

In other words, I'd check to the raiser ... and then I'd probably call. If I was in a late position (and hadn't raised originally) ... I'd also call if somebody bet. But, it would be a weak call - meaning that I probably wouldn't go any further with the hand if I don't get any help on Fourth and somebody bets at me again.

One of the reasons I'd call on the Flop is because my Pair might be the best hand. just because the other guy raised it originally doesn't mean he has to have a big Pair in the pocket. So, there's a possibility I've got the best hand right now. I'd know more depending on what he did on Fourth St. If he bet again (and I didn't help my hand) ... I'd get rid of it pretty fast. I wouldn't invest a lot of money with that hand without any help.

But, the main reason I'd call on the Flop is because of the possibility I could win a big pot if I improve my hand and beat a hand (two Aces or two Kings). And the reason I check rather than bet is because I might have the best hand and I could get myself shut-out if I bet and get raised. Then, I'd have to throw my hand away. By checking, I could call a reasonable bet and try to catch a card.

If I did improve on Fourth, I'd play it from then on just like I would in the situation where I got a poor Flop, but got some help on Fourth.

A good (or even a great Flop) to a 7d-6d would be a Pair with a Straight (or Flush) draw, Two-Pair, Trips, a Straight or a Flush (even though it's a small one).

With any good Flop to small connecting cards ... I'd play the hand as if it was complete - whether it was or not. I'd lead with the hand in an early position ... and I'd raise in a late position.

I'd play the hand to get all my money in the center to start with - even if I turned a Pair with a draw. In the latter case, I'd play it that way because I'd have two chances to win it ... when I bet or raise (and my opponent throws his hand away) - or when I improve (if my bet or raise is called). Naturally, you'll be in some jeopardy - even when you get a very good Flop. But, you're almost always in some jeopardy. So you can't worry about somebody having the nuts all the time. If you did ... you never would get to play a pot.

For example, if you turned a Flush with somebody else ... yours will probably be the little one - and you'd be dead.* If it happened ... you'd just have to lose your money because you'd (almost always) have to go ahead and pay your opponent off. It's one of the hazards of the game.

You could also flop the ignorant (low) end of the Straight. That would be another hazard if somebody turns a bigger Straight. And again, if your opponent bet anything within reason, you'd have to go ahead and pay him. For example, if the Flop was a 10-9-8 and somebody moved all-in on you, you'd be down to judgement. You'd have to know your player ... and a lot would depend on how much is in the pot and the amount he sets you in for. If you've got $1000 in the pot and he bets you $50,000 more ... well, perhaps, you wouldn't go for it and you'd throw your hand away. But, if you've got $1000 in the pot and he bets you $2000 more - all your money, or all his money - then you'd surely pay it off. If you're beat...you're beat.

That happens a lot, by the way. And, it's why (as you'll later learn) a K-9, J-7 and hands like that are trash and shouldn't be played (in a normal ante, Ring game).

With all the good Flops, I'd already be committed to the pot ... so, on Fourth St., I'd bet - if I was first or if it was checked to me. But, as always, there are exceptions.

***There's no way you can draw out when It's a Flush against a Flush In Hold 'em ... except for a Straight-Flush.**

For example, if you flopped a Diamond Flush and another Diamond came on Fourth St. - your hand would be almost ruined. All you'd have is a Seven-high Flush. At that point, you must check your hand and hope to show it down. If you can't show it down ... you've got to throw it away. Or, if you flopped a Straight and the Board pairs on Fourth St. - you could also be in trouble. Usually, that shouldn't stop you because if a man turned a Set or Two-Pair, he would've raised you on the Flop. So, if he made a Full (when the Board paired) ... you'd have to pay him off. Another hazard.

As you continue to use my system of play, you'll discover the many advantages it has. The situation above is a good case in point. If the Flop was, say a 5-4-3 (giving me a Straight) ... my opponent would've let me know on the Flop whether or not he had a hand (Two-Pair or Trips). That is, if he's a good player he would.

The reason why is because he wouldn't want another card to fall that would be one card off of a Straight. He knows if an Ace, Deuce, Six, or Seven comes on Fourth ... he's going to have to give the pot up. He knows I'll bet in that case whether or not I have the one card that'll make the Straight.

For that reason, all good Hold 'em players do most of their gambling on the Flop... not on Fourth and Fifth Sts. Occasionally, you'll see a big pot played after the Flop ... but, in the majority of cases, all the money usually goes in on the Flop. That's the reason the Flop is the most crucial point in the game.

You'll recall that earlier I stated it's quite inconceivable to me that anybody could get away from their hand if they flopped a Set of Trips in a raised pot. At that point, I was talking about a hidden Set (a Pair in the pocket and one on the Board). It's a different case entirely when the Pair is on the Board and I have one of the matching cards in the hole. I've turned down a lot of Sets in a situation like that when, for example, I have a 7-6 and the Flop is 7-7-2 ... and I bet and get called. There's really not very many hands someone can call me with.

So it's easy to release a Set in this case because when you get a lot of money involved you know the guy who's in there with you has probably got a Seven also. (It's especially true if he's the aggressor.) So you have to evaluate your kicker. I mean ... what's it worth? The conclusion I reach is that it's usually not worth very much. If I really think he's got a Seven then I know the best I

could hope for is that I've got him tied. Of course, I'm talking about a good player ... and it's much more likely he's got me beat.

He's probably in there with a Seven and a higher card that he could've flopped a Straight with (such as an 8-7, 9-7 or 10-7). Another possibility is that he's got a high card (such as an Ace or King) that's suited. He might have a 7-6 (like I do) or a 7-5 (the only likely hand I could beat). But it's almost inconceivable he's in there with a 7-4, 7-3 or a 7-2 (although the latter hand would give him a Full).

So when I got down into the hand and I gave him credit for the other Seven because he was showing a whole lot of speed ... I couldn't continue playing my Seven with a small connecting card. And I release that Set quite readily. I'd do it real quick.

When I have a Set like that with a different kicker, I make another evaluation. If my kicker was slightly bigger... say a Nine or Ten - I'd probably play it. If I had a suited Ace or King then I'd definitely go ahead and play it.

Of course, the situation could be quite different when I turn a Set with that 7-6 ... where I might not release it. This would be the case where I raised with the hand before the Flop. Now, on the Flop, everybody checks it to me ... and I bet. Somebody plays-back (check-raises me). In this situation, I might go ahead with my hand figuring that the guy was trying to shut me out. He might be playing-back with an overpair or a lot of different hands he might not have played too strong (raised me with) before the Flop.

It would also be a different situation if I had called a small raise before the Flop in a late position with a 7-6. Now, I would not give the raiser credit for a Seven if a 7-7-2 fell. And I'd probably play my hand real fast trying to win a big pot.

Whenever there's a raise before the Turn ... there's a chance you can win a big pot. But, in an unraised pot ... it's hard to win a big one. Earlier I noted that you don't want to get broke in a "nothing" pot. I'm reminding you of that now because you might try to win a big pot when you turn a Set with small connecting cards in an unraised pot. You. shouldn't. I never jeopardize very much money without a real good hand when I don't have anything in the pot to protect. I don't go out of my way to win "nothing" pots.

Another important part of my playing philosophy I want to remind you about is this:

You should constantly be trying to get as much value for your hand as you can. And the way you do that is to bet.
That should be clear by now. You become a big winner at Poker by betting ... raising ... and re-raising - by playing aggressively. Of course, there are times

you have to play defensively - when an aggressive strategy would be wrong because it could defeat your purpose by getting you shut-out of a pot. But, in general, you want to be aggressive.

That means you can't let every card that hits the Board constantly threaten you. As I said, if you're always worrying about somebody having the nuts ... you never will get to play a hand. This applies to all the hands I've discussed, but it's especially meaningful here because I'm discussing how to play small connecting cards when you get a good Flop. That's what you're playing them for in the first place ... so, when you make something with them - you want to get value for them. So you should always apply this principle:

If you're going to call... you might as well bet.
You should do that at all the stages of play ... but it's particularly important on the end.

If you do ... you'll get paid off with hands that aren't what you thought they were. I mean, there'll be many times you'll put your opponent on a hand completely different from what he's got. I'm not Houdini ... and neither are you. You might think a man is drawing to a Flush ... but maybe he's got a Pair - just one Pair. He might have been running you down with a lot less than you thought he had. So, when a Flush card hits the Board on Fifth St. - it may not have helped him at all. I mean, you'll know he's got something when that Flush card comes.. either the Flush you thought he was drawing at - or some other piece of the Flop. Or maybe he's got Two-Pair when you've got a Straight. You really don't know what he's got ... but since you're going to pay it off anyway since you've got a good hand with your small connecting cards - you might as well bet.

The only exception I make is when the Board pairs on the end. Then, I'll check it ... and may or may not call depending on how I feel about the situation. But barring that, if I've made a real good hand with my small connecting cards ... I'd go ahead and bet.

The opposite of the case where I might be a little concerned when I don't have the nuts is, of course, when I do have the nuts. Naturally, in that case, I'll do whatever I think will get the most money in the pot.

If I thought my opponent had a strong hand ... I'd make a big bet. If I thought he had a weak hand ... I'd try to sell my hand by making a smaller bet. There'd be a lot of judgement there ... judgement about what I think he's got.

My decision on how much to bet depends on whether I made my hand early (on the Flop) or late (on the end).

If I made my hand early. ..I'm not going to try to sell him anything - I'm going to try to break him.

If I made my hand late and I haven't been charged a lot of money to make it (like it was checked on the Flop and there was a small bet on Fourth and I make the nuts (in the end) ... well, then I'm not going to try to break him - because he probably won't call a big bet. Then, I'd try to sell my hand for whatever I thought I could get for it.

Those of you who are new to No-Limit Hold 'em may not have been able to appreciate how strongly I feel about the small connecting cards. And of those of you who are experienced players were probably quite surprised. But, that's where it's all at in my opinion. You have to use a lot of judgement when you play the small connecting cards ... and when you play them right - they're big money-makers. And that's what No-Limit Hold 'em is' all about.

Chapter Three:
Borderline or Trouble Hands

You should commit to memory the following list of trouble hands. I call them that because that's exactly what they are ... and I only play them in borderline situations.* They're hands you can lose a lot of money with ... so you should play them very cautiously. You don't want to jeopardize much money with them.

TROUBLE HANDS (only when offsuit)

Ace-Queen	King-Queen	Queen Jac	Jack-Ten
Ace-Jack	King-Jack	Queen-Ten	Nine-Eight
Ace-Ten	King-Ten		

***Two Important qualifications are that I don't consider the trouble hands borderline when:**

(1) they're suited; and

(2) I get them In a short-handed game. As you'll learn, I define a shorthanded game as one with four players or lost and In such a game the *trouble* hands are actually big hands.

The reason I consider those hands borderline is because I'd question calling a raise with them. If they're suited, I'll call a raise with them and go ahead and take a turn. When they're not suited, I won't call a raise if I'm out of position.

By out of position I mean that I'm in a middle position and a man in an early position came in raising. I'll pass these hands in that spot.

If I'm in a late position and the pot's been raised and another man calls ... well, then I'll usually call with them but, I'll hear another bell ringing when I do. This time, that bell will be reminding me to play my hand with extreme caution...unless I get an excellent turn to it.

The reason why you have to be so careful with those hands is because with every one of them you might be up against a hand where you'd be almost dead. Most players consider A-A, K-K or A-K to be the best raising hands ... so there's a good possibility the raiser has one of those three hands. True, you can't always assume that ... but it's always in the back of your mind. So, if you've got A-Q, A-J or A-10 ... and you're up against A-A, K-K or A-K ... you've got a terrible hand.

It's extremely hard to win a big pot with those hands (offsuited) when you've called a raise. They're definitely trouble hands. You're much more likely to lose a big pot with them than you are to win a big pot with them. Even when I make a Pair with them on the Flop ... I play them extremely cautiously - or about the same way I'd play when I had a Pair of Aces or Kings in the pocket.

For example, if I played a K-Q (offsuit) and the Board came K-4-2 ... I'd be in a lot of trouble if the raiser's got one of the three hands I've assumed he might have. He'd have two Aces, three Kings or a Pair of Kings (like I've got) but he'd have an Ace kicker.

Or, if I played a 9-8 and the Flop was Q-J-10 ... I still wouldn't be too excited about my hand - even though I turned a Straight. It would not only be the ignorant end of the Straight ... but it would have an additional weakness because the high-end of the Straight would be made up by a very strong hand that everybody plays - namely, A-K.

Something else you have to think about with the trouble hands is that it's not as easy to pick-up pots with them when you turn a Straight draw. You'll remember that when I turn a Straight draw with small connecting cards, I play my hand real fast because I have two shots to win the pot. I can win the pot right on the Flop because, with small cards out there it's less likely anyone else turned a hand. And, if I do get called, I've still got a second shot to win it if I make my Straight.

But, if I turn a Straight draw with a K-Q (say, the Flop is J-10-5) ... it's highly likely somebody's got a piece of that Flop - and I'm less likely to pick the pot up when I bet. So, I don't have two shots to win it anymore.

The same kind of reasoning applies to the times when you might turn the top Pair and a Straight draw with a K-Q when the Flop is Q-J-10. It's not even a good hand then because you might be dead (as you would be with a 9-8) when somebody has an A-K. The best you could be drawing for would be a split.

Even when you turn a very good hand like Two-Pair or Trips ... you could be in jeopardy. If the Flop was K-K-2... you could once again be in big trouble with K-Q when someone's got A-K. The difference here is that you probably won't be able to get away from your hand and you'll have to go ahead and lose a lot of money.

The important point to remember about the trouble hands is when you do get a Flop to them you don't want to get heavily involved. You should just try to play the pot as cheaply as possible.
A minor exception to the above consideration is when you turn a Straight (meaning that you must use both your hole cards as when you have, say a Q-

10 and the Flop is K-J-9 or J-9-8). However, even in this case (when you have the nuts) ... there's a chance you could lose the pot. If a Queen fell on Fourth, with the K-J-9 Flop, you could lose to an A-10 ... and with the J-9-8 Flop, you could lose to a K-10. So, you're not completely safe with some of these hands even when you turn the nuts.

When you have one of the trouble hands suited ... it's a much stronger hand.* For example, if you had the Kd-Qd and the Flop was 1Os-7d-2d ... you'd have a real big hand. Not only would you have a Flush draw, but you'd also have two overcards. Or, if you had the 9d-8d with that Flop, you'd have a Straight and a Flush draw. That situation (with either the Kd-Qd or the 9d-8d) would be a good opportunity to check-raise somebody if you were in an early position. If you were in a late position and somebody leads into you...you could raise them. Now, you'd be back to the principle where you'd have two shots to pick-up the pot. You might win it right there ... or, if you get called, you'd have a good hand to fall back on.

Chapter Three:
Trash Hands

With the exception of an Ace or a King with any suited card ... I consider any hand I haven't already discussed to be a trash hand. An Ac-8c or a Kh-4h are hands that I put in the same category as the small connecting cards and I play them approximately the same way. For example, if the Flop was 9h-6c-2c, and I had the Ac-8c ... I'd have a Flush draw and an overcard. If I was in the pot against two Queens ... I'd be about even-money to win it. So I'd play my hand in that situation like I would with two small connecting cards that were suited (say the 9c-8c). That is, I'd play it fast ... and try to win the pot on the Flop because, once again, I'd have two shots to win it.

***However, the trouble hands suited or offsuit should be played the came way - slowly - unless you Flop a Flush or a Flush draw. Then, you can show some Speed.**

But that's where I draw the line - with an Ace or a King and another suited card. After it passed the Ace and King ... if the two cards don't connect - even if they're suited - I consider them trash hands. Hands like a Qh-4h or Js-6s are trash.

Naturally, hands with non-connecting and offsuit cards such as Jh-5c, 1Os-3d, 9c-4h are obviously garbage. But, so are the offsuit hands such as K-9, Q-8, J-7, 10-6, 9-5, 8-4, 7-3 and 6-2 that a lot of people play because you can turn a Straight with them. I don't play those hands because if I got the best Flop I could to them (outside of a Full House) ... I could get broke with them by running into a bigger Straight. Consequently, I never play a hand when I have the top and bottom cards of a Straight - except when I'm in position.

I always make exceptions when I'm in position - even with the trash hands. For example, I might call a raise before the Flop if I was on the Button with a hand like A-8 (offsuit) - or any of the garbage hands - if enough (say, five) people were in the pot in front of me ... and I didn't think there'd be any more raises. I might call a small raise and take a turn with a trash hand because it's a good percentage play. I'd be trying to turn a Full, Trips or Two Pair. But, if I don't get a real good Flop to the hand ... I'll throw it away. I won't get involved and burn up a bunch of money with one of those trash hands. I'm not going to call any bets on the Flop. I'll be raising ... or I'll be gone.

I'd even raise with a trash hand if I was in position. More than that ... I'd play it fast after the Flop, too. If the guys in the early positions threw their hands away and someone in a middle position limped-in ... well, if I'm on the Button, I'd be in position and I'd raise it regardless of what two cards I have. And, if it was checked to me on the Flop ... I'd bet regardless of what flopped.

Obviously, I wouldn't be playing my hand because of its value. Trash hands have no value. I might as well be playing with two blank cards in this situation because all I'd be doing is playing my position and my opponent. I'd feel like he's got a weak hand to begin with (because he limped-in) and if he misses it ... I'll be able to pick the pot up. **Other than the exceptional situations I discussed, trash hands are just not playable.**

Chapter Three:
Short-Handed Play

A lot of times you'll be in a full (Ring) game and before the night's over you'll be playing short-handed. As I already mentioned, you have to be able to *change gears* in such a situation. You should play in the same basic style aggressively - but you should realize that all the hands increase in value. This is particularly true of the big cards.

And, in a short-handed game, the trouble hands all become playable from almost any position. Also, position is probably the most important thing in a short-handed game.
The reason that's so is because you get to look at more cards and have to play more hands than you would in a Ring game. You also play your position more than your cards in a short-handed game.

When your game's down to four-handed, you need a better hand in the first two positions than you need in the last two. When you raise on the Button, the other man has to act first (on the Flop) and that puts him at a big disadvantage. It's a great equalizer when the other man has to act on his hand first.

So, in a short-handed game, you'd play your position along the same theories I discussed in a full game - except the values of the hands go up a few notches. The *trouble* hands become better hands because you don't figure to be up against A-A, K-K or A-K nearly as often as you might in a Ring game.

You simply play more in line with a big-card theory in a short-handed game. I mean, the bigger your cards are ... the better hand you'll have. For instance, two Aces or two Kings is just a mountain in a short-handed game ... and you could play them real fast. But, in a Ring game, you might play either hand a lot slower because there could be a lot of people taking a Turn to beat those big Pairs. That **wouldn't** be the case in a short-handed game. Consequently, they're much more valuable hands than they are in a Ring game. What you're trying to catch in a short-handed game is big cards in position.

Chapter Three:
Insurance

Many times when you're playing No-Limit Hold 'em a player will have all his money in the pot before or on the Flop (or even on Fourth St.). Since there are cards to come and since no more betting can take place (if it's a head?up situation), both players will generally turn their hands over so that *Insurance* can be considered.*

Insurance is a side-bet that's usually made between the two players involved in the pot or between one of the players involved and an *Insurance Man* who may or may not be an active player. The player with the hand having the best potential to win the pot is offered (or asks for) some Insurance. Taking Insurance is a way to protect your investment in the pot. But, it's always a bad bet (unless a mistake is made). As it is in life away from the Poker table, the *Insurance Man* won't be giving away anything. When he lays you a price on your hand ... he'll be getting the best of it. The price you'll be getting will always be considerably less than the true price your hand is worth. (See the *Appendix* and below.) The difference between the true price and the actual price the *Insurance Man* is willing to lay is his *Vigorish* (edge or Commission).

***There's no rule that says you must turn your hand over, but such a request is rarely (if over) refused.**

I used the phrase "best potential to win the pot" because it's not always the best hand on the Flop that has the best winning potential. For example, if the Flop was 7c-5d-4d and you had the 7d-6d ... you'd be the favorite (about 2 1/3 to 1) over an opponent with a Pair of Kings (say, the Ks-Kh). You'd have 20 cards in the deck that could win for you with two shots to catch any one of them.*

I try not to take *Insurance* myself. I try to lay it because the best (potential) hand always has to take the worst of it. For example, if you're a 3 to 2 favorite ... well, the best you can usually get is 13 to 10 (or maybe 7 to 5). So why take it? That's the edge you're looking for to start with. If you take *Insurance* ... you're giving up your edge.

Through the years, I've heard a lot of discussion about whether you should or shouldn't take *Insurance*.

My advice is to lay the *Insurance* ... but *don't* **take it.**

You can't argue with mathematical facts when you have the best of something. If you can lay 7 to 5 on a 3 to 2 shot ... you should do it. But you shouldn't take 7 to 5 when you're a 3 to 2 favorite. It's that simple.

However, I can understand that if a man was on a short bankroll...well, perhaps then he should take Insurance. I guess it would be O.K. to take the worst of it so you could stay in action. But, if your bankroll warrants it ... don't take Insurance - lay it.

I used to talk about a related subject with a very big (and very successful) gambler I've known for many years. He said "if a man came in and offered to lay me 10 to 1 on the flip of a coin for all the money I had in the world ... I WOULDN'T take it." He said he just couldn't liquidate everything he's got - all of his property and his cash. He wouldn't risk losing it all. It would be over a million dollars. He wouldn't do it even if he thought he could get hold of another million.

*Your Straight-Flush draw gives you 15 wins and you have five more wins with the 3-Sixes and 2-Sevens that are still In the dock. Of course, the assumption here Is that your opponent's hand doesn't improve.

But, I'd do it. I surely would. I'd just have to. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to take 10 to 1 on an even?money shot. I'd do it because I have enough confidence in myself that I'd be able to come up with another million if I lost.

Chapter Three:
A Final Word

Of course, I'm sure you understand that all the numerous possibilities have by no means been exhausted. No-Limit Hold 'em is a highly complex game. It's hardly possible (and certainly not practical) to attempt to discuss the enormous variety of situations that could occur. And, as you now know, there are certain questions I couldn't answer definitively because even I don't know exactly what I'd do until I was faced with the problem. As I've said, at such times, I go with my "feeling" which is really a rapid analysis of conscious and sub-conscious facts.

Nevertheless, I've given you a lot of *white meat* (sophisticated techniques and strategies) that have only been known by a few world-class Poker players - and, in some cases, not even then.

The average player has never had access to the kind of information you've just read. First of all, nothing as comprehensive as this has ever been written about No-Limit Hold 'em. Even if it was, unless it was written by someone who has played at a world-class level for many years - and who was a consistent winner - it would not be of much value. In fact, it could even be harmful. Having no information at all is better than having bad information.

So ... you should do quite well at No-Limit Hold 'em now that you know almost as much about the game as I do. The rest is up to you.