Use this discount code:

ThanksForSupportingAuthor

http://edmillerpoker.com/

Authorized torrent preview of

Playing The Player

Moving Beyond ABC Poker
To Dominate Your Opponents

Ed Miller
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 7

WHAT IS ABC POKER? 10
OPTIMAL POKER 12
PLAYING THE PLAYER 14
A NOTE ABOUT BALANCE AND EXPLOITABILITY 17

PART I: TIGHT PLAYERS 21

PLAYING AGAINST TIGHT PLAYERS 23
TRAIT NO. 1. REFUSING TO FELT WITHOUT THE NUTS 24
TRAIT NO. 2. LIMP-FOLDING PREFLOP 29
TRAIT NO. 3. TIGHT PLAYER BET-SIZING TELLS 34
TRAIT NO. 4. BET-FOLDING 40
TRAIT NO. 5. POT-CONTROLLING 53
TRAIT NO. 6. REFUSING TO FIRE A SECOND OR THIRD BARREL 58
TIGHT PLAYER REVIEW AND EXERCISES 65

PART II: LOOSE-AGGRESSIVE PLAYERS 83

PLAYING AGAINST LOOSE-AGGRESSIVE PLAYERS 85
TRAIT NO. 1. FREQUENT PREFLOP RAISING AND POSTFLOP BARRELING 87
UNDERSTANDING RANGE VERSUS RANGE THINKING 98
UNDERSTANDING PREFLOP 3-BETTING 104
TRAIT NO. 2: REFLEXIVE WEAKNESS ATTACKING 132
LOOSE-AGGRESSIVE PLAYER REVIEW AND EXERCISES 138
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PART III: BAD PLAYERS</th>
<th>155</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WINNING IN WILD GAMES</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAIT NO. 1. PEELING LIGHT ON THE FLOP AND GETTING STICKY AT SHOWDOWN</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRAIT NO. 2. ABSOLUTELY REFUSING TO FOLD AN OVERPAIR</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PART IV: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINDING HOLES</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOP 10 PLAYS TO TRY THAT YOU AREN’T USING TODAY</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAND QUIZZES</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINAL THOUGHTS</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

What makes a poker player good?

It’s a harder question to answer than you might imagine.

In other games, the answer to this question is simpler. A good tennis player is someone who wins many matches and tournaments. We can expect that such a player would have a good fitness level, would have strong fundamentals—footwork, serve, forehand, backhand, and so forth—and would have at least a passable psychological game.

A good chess player is someone who wins many games and tournaments. We can expect that such a player would have an excellent knowledge of the game, good positional and tactical skills, and at least passable concentration and psychological control.

But what makes a good poker player? Is it someone who wins many tournaments? Not really. If someone were to win tournament after tournament, this would almost certainly indicate an excellent poker player. But there’s so much luck in poker that you can’t look at the winner of any single tournament or short series of tournaments and say, “That player is a good poker player.”

Is a good poker player one who understands well the fundamentals of the game? Perhaps, though I’d say that the vast majority of poker players misunderstand which skills are “fundamental” to poker.

Most people I think would say that a good poker player is one who wins at a high rate, as measured in dollars per hour (or per 100 hands played), over a long period of time.

Winrate. It’s the ultimate measuring stick of a poker player.

Here’s the thing. Most students of poker learn to play in a particular, static style that is designed to play well enough in a variety of game environments, but will rarely maximize
winrate in any particular game. In other words, poker players learn how *not to lose* at poker (thereby winning at a modest rate). They don’t learn how to win.

Why is this? There are two reasons. Poker players are a lazy lot. Now, nearly all humans are lazy by this definition, so I don’t intend to malign poker players in particular. Most players want a plug-and-play strategy—one they can use in nearly any game type to hold their own. After all, poker is risky enough as it is. Why add further risk to the equation by making adjustments that could backfire?

Specifically, most poker players look for “standard lines” to take. With top pair, I bet the flop, fold to a raise, check the turn, and bet the river for value. With a combo draw on the flop, I bet and get it in if raised. These standard lines are often designed to win in many common game environments, while also often managing variance. Standard lines allow you to play poker without fully engaging your brain. You can watch TV, chit-chat, play on your phone, or do whatever else while still playing a winning poker game.

The other reason players learn not to lose is that it’s a much lower bar to reach than learning to maximize winrate. In order to maximize winrate, you have to adapt aggressively to your game conditions. Adapting requires you to do a few things right all at the same time.

- You have to identify correctly how your opponents are playing. This is not always simple, as hot and cold runs of cards can skew your perception of your opponents’ play styles.
- You have to identify the correct adjustment to make against your opponents.
- You have to implement the adjustments. You have to have the presence of mind to identify situations that call for an adjustment, and then you have to pull the trigger.
You have to identify when an opponent makes an adjustment based on your play and readjust.

This requires much more mental effort than playing not to lose. It requires much more work away from the table. And it also requires you to have very strong tilt control. But if you’re looking for a breakthrough in your play, it’s the only option.

So what’s this book about? It’s about taking the first two steps toward learning to win at poker rather than playing not to lose. I will help you to identify how your opponents are playing and to identify the correct adjustments to make. I will show you example hands where the adjustment may be appropriate.

You will not be a poker master after reading this book. Poker mastery requires thousands of hours of study—and the right kind of study at that—to achieve.

My goal with this book is more humble, but it’s still very powerful. I want to open your eyes. You probably know a bit about how to play poker already. I want to show you how much more there is to the game that you aren’t taking advantage of. I want to show you the sorts of things that the players with the monster winrates are doing that you aren’t.

And I want to start your journey into the unknown on a good footing. I will show you a few simple adjustments that are relatively safe and easy to apply and that will give you a taste of what it feels like to be truly awesome at poker.

If you’re ready to move beyond ABC poker to see what more is out there, keep reading.
What is ABC Poker?

Before I teach you how to move beyond ABC poker, I need to define it.

If I were to ask most poker players what it means to pay “ABC,” I’d expect answers like this. Solid poker. Patient poker. Poker by the fundamentals. Good poker.

I think these answers reflect a general misunderstanding most players have about how to play poker well.

Here’s what I mean when I talk about ABC poker. It’s a strategy defined by

- Tight play on the first betting round
- Tight play on later betting rounds with marginal holdings
- Fast play of strong holdings on early betting rounds
- Betting aggressively for value and bluffing infrequently
- Folding to uncommon aggression

Basically you start with good hands and bet them hard until you get raised. When that happens, you fold or sometimes call down. You do a little bluffing, but not a whole lot of it.

This strategy wins in most small stakes poker games. It wins because there are enough players in these games who make gross errors understanding hand values. Basically, they call too often with bad hands.

Here’s the thing. There is nothing that is “fundamental” about ABC play. It is a non-optimal strategy designed to exploit the most common mistakes that really bad players
make while simultaneously not losing too much to good players.

Basically, ABC play seeks to trade making lots of small and consistent mistakes to good players in hopes of benefiting from much larger mistakes from bad players. Since there are more bad players in small stakes games than good ones, ABC players make money over time.

But stick an ABC player in a $25-$50 online 6-max game with five sharp opponents, and it will be a bloodbath. This is because an ABC strategy is markedly non-optimal, and it also doesn’t exploit any of the mistakes that sharp players tend to make.

Here’s the bottom line. ABC play is a simple, non-optimal, exploitative strategy that makes money in soft games. ABC play loses consistently in tough games.

Playing to win makes more profit than ABC play in soft games. And it’s the only way to try to win in a tough game.

Most poker players simply don’t understand this reality. They view ABC play in a much more positive light. It’s “solid.” It’s “fundamental.” Deviating from ABC play is “fancy play.” They think that if only they could control the emotional aspect of the game better—tilt, boredom, etc.—and play ABC all the time, they’d do great at poker.

Before I move on, I don’t want you to think that I’m trashing ABC play completely. ABC play is a (relatively) simple strategy that wins at small stakes poker. That’s remarkable. It’s a strategy that provides many players with everything they want from the game—an enjoyable way to pass the time, grinding out a little spending cash to boot.

But don’t misunderstand ABC play for something it isn’t. And if your goals are to win more and move up faster, you’ll need something else.
Optimal Poker

Poker is a math problem.

That doesn’t mean that you have to “do math” to be good at poker. But poker is a problem that can be solved mathematically.

It’s too complex a math problem to solve completely with today’s technology. But we can solve similar, but simplified, problems and then generalize the answers to actual poker. Many people have done this, and this analysis is a major reason that the best poker players have gotten much, much better in recent years.

If we were able to solve poker completely, the solution would be what I will call “optimal poker.” A theoretical player playing optimal poker would break even against another player playing the same strategy. Optimal poker would win money from every other, non-optimal strategy.

What would optimal strategy look like? In no-limit hold’em, it would be much more aggressive than most players play. It’s hard to make a good hand at no-limit hold’em, and therefore the fold equity from aggression is valuable.

The optimal strategy would also involve calling down with hands most players would tend to fold. Since an optimal player is playing very aggressively, it’s required to call down a lot to stay competitive.

Two optimal players would be betting and raising a lot, getting the money in a lot, and frankly trading money back and forth at a rate that would alarm most no-limit players.

What if you were to play this theoretical optimal strategy in a regular small stakes game? You would win over time, that’s
for sure. After all, poker is a math problem, and it’s impossible to beat an optimal strategy over the long haul.

But you’d also be doing some things that, to a casual observer, might look a little silly. You’d sometimes be launching big bluffs into calling stations. You’d sometimes be calling down nits with marginal hands. These are plays that are required to protect yourself against another optimal player. But small stakes players don’t play optimally. They make large, consistent, and most importantly, predictable errors.

What if you played the optimal strategy, but you reduced the frequency of bluffing into calling stations and also of calling down nits? You’d win even more than an optimal player would. These are adjustments designed to exploit the predictable mistakes that bad players make.

Now let’s get back to the real world. You don’t know what the optimal strategy is. But you can identify mistakes other players make and exploit them. The more mistakes you identify and exploit, the more you will win. If you do it well, you can win even more than if you played an optimal strategy and win far more than with an ABC strategy.
Playing The Player

Now we get to the main subject of the book. If you want to play to win, you have to play your opponents. You want to identify the consistent mistakes they make and then put them in situations to make these mistakes repeatedly.

On poker message boards, I often see people ask how to play a LAG style. LAG stands for loose-aggressive, and the idea these people have is that loose-aggressive players win more money than TAG, or tight-aggressive, players. Basically they have the idea that one can improve upon ABC play, and that playing LAG is the answer.

It is a fact that excellent no-limit hold’em players often play quite loose and register high winrates. But it’s not the loose preflop style that is the key. Playing bad preflop hands is always a handicap, no matter how good you are.

These guys have identified mistakes their opponents make. These mistakes usually come after the flop. The good players are playing lots of hands because they want to create as many situations as possible for their opponents to make these mistakes. They are willing to fade the weak preflop hands, as long as they can generate enough advantageous situations after the flop to offset.

So playing loose is not the point. The point is the mistake and the related adjustment. If the mistake is big enough, one can play loosely to exploit it fully.

Here’s a simple example. Say you encounter an opponent who loves to steal the blinds. With nearly any hand on the button, he will raise. If called and checked to on the flop, he’ll
nearly always bet. But after this flop bet, he’ll tend to give up with all of his bad hands.

If someone is raising most hands preflop and betting every flop, the vast majority of the time he’ll be weak. You can exploit this weakness by check-raising the flop or by check-calling and betting the turn or river with a wide range of hands.

Someone who plays ABC no-limit hold’em rarely defends blinds against a steal. Since playing out of position is a disadvantage, this player folds preflop in these marginal situations. But you can do much, much better against this aggressive blind stealer. You can call with lots of hands and then check-raise the flop often. It’s an exploitative adjustment to a player who is making consistent errors.

You could make this same exploitative adjustment without calling with more hands preflop. You could keep a tight preflop calling range, but simply check-raise the flop with more of your missed hands.

But why restrict yourself like that? If check-raising the flop with air is profitable, then why not play more hands? Doing so will increase your winrate.

You’re not playing more hands just to play more hands. Instead, first you’re identifying a mistake. To exploit some mistakes you must have a hand at showdown. Others you can exploit with any hand. When you can exploit the mistake with any hand, loosening up will frequently supercharge your winrate.

What’s the moral of the story? I think it’s this. Don’t focus on how tight or loose you play. Trying to play looser just for its own sake is not a winning recipe. Don’t ditch ABC just because you know something better is out there.

Focus on trying to improve, one play at a time. Look for a single mistake your regular opponents routinely make. Think
about how you can exploit it. Then run your counter-play as often as you can.

Do it again. Find another mistake they make. Think about how you can exploit it. Then run that counter-play as often as you can.

Do it again. And again. And again.

Don’t try to overhaul your current strategy. If you play ABC right now, that’s fine. It’s a good, winning starting point. Refine your game bit by bit by searching for and executing these exploitative plays. It’s an incremental process. And it’s how you get really good at this game.

I could end the book right here. Look for the specific things your opponents are doing wrong and exploit them. The more you find and exploit, the more money you’ll make.

But you could probably use some examples to get the ball rolling, right? That’s what the rest of the book is. I’m going to list a number of traits that are common among small- and medium-stakes no-limit hold’em players. I’ll tell you what the trait is. I’ll tell you what sorts of players commonly exhibit the trait. I’ll tell you, if I can, why I think these players show this trait.

Then I’ll talk about the mistakes a player will make due to having this trait. I’ll give example hands and show why it’s a mistake. Then I’ll suggest ways to adjust your game to exploit the mistake.

Again, these are just examples. Poker evolves. Any given trait or mistake may be common now, but uncommon in a few years. Memorizing the specifics in this book won’t make you a great player. Instead, understand the process behind it so that you can find mistakes and develop counter-strategies on your own. If you learn to do that, this book will have done its job.
A Note About Balance And Exploitability

Before I get on with all the examples, I have a final point to make.

I said before that poker is a math problem. It’s also a game of information hiding.

Whenever you act on a poker hand, you betray information. If you raise under the gun in a no-limit game, you are more likely to have AA than you are to have 93o, even though you’ll be dealt 93o twice as often as AA. This is because you tend to fold 93o while you tend to raise AA. Thus, your raise betrays information.

You could perfectly hide information about your hand by playing everything the same way. For instance, you could simply move all-in with every hand, and you’d be perfectly unreadable. Unfortunately, you would also be risking way too much money with way too weak a range of hands, and you would quickly lose.

The goal is to balance the amount of information you betray with the amount of money you are putting at risk. Sure, generally you will risk more money with better hands. But within that framework you want to give up as little specific information as possible. If you always have a strong hand when you make a big bet, your opponents can exploit you by simply folding. By always having a strong hand when you bet a certain amount, you are betraying far too much information with your betting. Poker players call this “unbalanced.”
A betting line is “unbalanced” when an opponent can identify too specifically the sort of hand you’ll have and can make a play different from the optimal strategy that exploits your tendency. Your line is balanced when you have hidden information well, and your opponent is guessing as much as practicable.

Many players focus on having balanced betting lines. They think things like, “I can’t bet here as a bluff because I would never bet here with a value hand.” In theory, this is a strong way to think about how to play poker. If one were attempting to play near-optimal poker, it would be a critically important way to think.

In practice, your goal is to play poker against people who aren’t as good as you. Being not as good as you, they will be much less able to identify and exploit your mistakes than you are able to identify and exploit theirs. This means that you should spend your time trying to identify and exploit your opponents’ unbalanced lines without worrying too much about your own.

Why not worry about your own unbalanced lines? Because doing so at small stakes will have you tripping over your own feet and not winning the maximum.

Think about it this way. Say you watched a boxing match between a champion and the top challenger. How would you expect it to go? You’d expect the fighters to give each other respect. To feel each other out. To jab and probe, looking for weaknesses without exposing themselves to a knockout punch. This is analogous to playing poker with an eye toward keeping balanced lines.

Now say you watched a boxing match between the champion and your humble author. How do you think this one would go? I hope it never happens, but I’d bet the champ would come right at me, slug me a few times, and that would be it. If instead the champ decided to dance and probe with
me, you’d be thinking, “What the heck? Why doesn’t he just finish this?” Coming right at a weaker opponent is analogous to ignoring your own unbalanced lines and just going on the attack.

With weak small stakes players, you don’t have to worry so much about where you open vulnerabilities in your game. Just go on the attack. Sure, a savvy opponent could counter-punch you where it hurts, but that will happen rarely. Most of the time your attacking play will get the money much more efficiently than balanced play would.

Bottom line? Go ahead and think about where you are balanced and unbalanced. But when you see a mistake your opponent is making, pounce on it, even if it makes you unbalanced. Chances are high that no one will notice your vulnerability. At all but the very toughest online games, attacking your opponents full bore will get the money much faster than keeping up a good defense.
Part I: Tight Players
Playing Against Tight Players

I put tight players up front because these are the main players that an ABC strategy fails against. An ABC strategy is designed to exploit mistakes where people put too much money in the pot with weak hands. Tight players rarely do this, so ABC players will struggle against them.

No doubt you’ve heard people complain about how there’s “no action” in a game, or that it’s “just a bunch of nits.” The implication is that it’s hard to win money at a tight game. If you insist on playing an ABC strategy, then it will indeed be very difficult to win.

But tight players usually deviate significantly from an optimal no-limit strategy, which makes them thoroughly exploitable. This section is devoted to common traits you’ll find among tight players (nits and TAGs) and how to get the best of them.
Trait No. 1. Refusing To Felt Without The Nuts

Overview

This trait is both very common and extremely exploitable. You’ll find this trait mostly among nits. (In fact, this is in many ways the defining trait of a nit.). It’s simple. Players with this trait will rarely put their entire stack at risk without a nutted hand.

Generally these players will be slightly more likely to call all-in without the nuts than they’ll be to bet all-in without the nuts. For instance, if there is a three flush on board and no pair, they will likely shove all-in on the river (assuming a shove is more than half the pot or so) with only the nut flush. With smaller flushes they’ll make smaller bets or even check it down.

They’ll call an all-in shove on the river with non-nut flushes, however. But a shove might get them to lay down two pair or a set without much internal debate.

Refusing to felt any hand that isn’t the nuts will generally have you folding far too often to a very aggressive player. It will also fail to get reasonable value for many strong but not nutted hands.

Specifically, these players tend to fold too much of their hand range to good-sized turn barrels.

For example, it’s a $2-$5 live no-limit hold’em game with $1,000 stacks. You open to $20, get a call behind you, and a nit who exhibits this trait calls in the big blind.
The flop comes $Q\heartsuit T\diamondsuit 4\diamondsuit$. You bet $40, the player behind folds, and the big blind calls.

To make both the preflop and flop call, the nit likely has a hand range that looks like

QQ-TT, 44
AQs, ATs, KQs, QJs, AdXd, KdJd, Jd9d, 9d8d-6d5d
AQo, KQo

Overall it’s a strong range that well represents the nit’s overall tight play. Now the turn is the $4\spadesuit$. He checks, and you bet $100. Which of these hands will the nit fold? It could be as many hands as these

JJ
ATs, KQs, QJs, AdXd (not Ad3d), 9d8d-8d7d
KQo

This has him folding any made hand weaker than AQ and any draw weaker than a combo straight and flush draw. For players with this trait, this turn folding range is reasonable. That means he’s continuing only with

QQ,TT,44
AQs, KdJd, Jd9d, Ad3d, 7d6d-6d5d
AQo

If you count the hand combinations, this player is folding 34 hand combos while continuing with 24 of them. On the turn you’re betting $100 to win the $140 pot, and the nit is folding over half of his range to the bet. It’s an auto-profit bet with any two cards.

Here’s the other thing. If the river comes a non-ace diamond or a king, you might have another profitable bluff. Of
the 24 hands that are calling the turn bet, half of them are ace-queen. A scare card could get a nit off of that hand for less than a pot-sized bet, giving the river bluff an overlay.

And on a non-diamond, non-straightening river, the nit could be folding nearly his entire range on the river to an overbet. If you assume that this player likely would have raised either the flop or turn with a set, then his calling range on the turn is mostly ace-queen with a few combo draws. These players don’t like to felt one-pair hands, even those as strong as ace-queen is on this board. So if all the draws brick, you could consider making a massive river bet to win the pot nearly every time.

**Adjustment Summary**

To take advantage of a player who is reluctant to felt non-nutted hands, you do a few things. First, you tend to raise pots preflop. Since you expect many situations postflop where you will be able to steal the pot even when you bloat it preflop, you might as well bloat it to win a bigger pot.

Second, you up your turn barreling frequency. The key difference between this sort of player and looser players is that these players are much more willing to fold draws and top pair on the turn than a typical player is. On many boards, particularly ones that brick on the turn, you will get these players to fold more than half of their hand ranges to a turn barrel.

Finally, even when you get called on the turn, you may be able to leverage a scare card on the river to complete the bluff. Or if the stacks are very deep, you may be able to use an overbet to get the player off of nearly their entire range. The success of the overbet relies on the assumption that your opponent would tend to raise earlier in the hand with a
monster like a set or top two. If this assumption holds, then this player’s turn calling range tends to consist of top pair/top kicker, overpairs, and very strong draws.

So you bloat pots preflop, and then steal more on the turn and river.

**Pitfalls to Avoid**

First, absolutely don’t make big calls against players who exhibit this trait. Obviously big bets are going to be nutted hands more often than against a typical player.

Some players with this trait may begin to call down more often against you if you keep pounding on them. They may call down with strong top pairs rather than release, and they may also call down with monster hands rather than raise early in the hand. This is a good counter-adjustment, and if you suspect your opponent may be making it, you should back off a bit.

**Who Exhibits This Trait**

I see this trait most commonly in small stakes live players. It’s rarer among online players.

Watch your game. If few hands are going to showdown and most seem to be ended by a turn bet, there’s a good chance a few players at your table are reluctant to felt without the nuts. If people are grumbling about how there’s no action at the table, that’s a good cue. If you see someone check down a very strong hand on the river, also suspect this trait. Checking a strong hand can also indicate a general ignorance of hand values, but players ignorant of hand values tend to play more loosely and make bad calldowns. If you see a player who is
making a lot of folds check a big hand down, it’s a great indicator that this trait is present.

**The Bottom Line**

Open up your preflop game. Raise limpers with a wide range of suited hands in position. Then barrel the flop. Barrel again on many good turns. And consider overbet bluffs on the river.
Trait No. 2. Limp-Folding Preflop

The first trait, refusing to felt non-nutted hands, applies at least to some extent to nearly every tight player. Tight players are more or less defined by an unwillingness to get the money in bad. This unwillingness makes them vulnerable to bluffing and semibluffing strategies.

Better tight players find semibluffing spots and call down light sometimes, making them less predictable and tougher to play against. But, overall, tight players profit by having the best hand more often than not when money goes in.

After refusing to felt non-nutted hands, the other tight traits are less universal. Some tight players exhibit them, and some don’t.

Overview

The first of these traits is limp-folding preflop. You’ll know this one when you see it. A player habitually limps into a pot and folds to raises behind.

Every once in a while, in certain specific game conditions, limp-folding can be an ok play. But some tight players do it over and over again, day in and day out. This is really bad and exploitable.

When everyone is playing optimally, the blind (and ante, if applicable) money shapes strategy. Without dead money,
there’d be no incentive to play any hand. If you’re opening the pot, you want the fold equity from raising.

Basically, limping plays little to no role in an optimal preflop strategy.

This isn’t to say that limping is always a bad play. It’s simply not an optimal play. Limping can, in some scenarios, be the best option to induce and exploit the mistakes your opponents make.

Limping in, first into the pot, and then folding to a normal-sized raise is usually a mistake. Game conditions would have to be extraordinary to make it correct.

**Adjustment Summary**

The adjustment should be obvious. Raise these players frequently preflop. They’re leaving money hanging out to dry. When these players limp in, I tend to raise roughly half of my button and cutoff hands. I raise all “playable” hands, and then I raise weak suited or connected hands like Q♦6♦, 8♥5♥, or 9♦8♠.

The beauty of the limp-folders is that they often carry their folding tendency with them to the flop. First, think about what sorts of hands they’re limping in with and then folding. For most of these players, it’s speculative suited hands—suited connectors, suited gapped hands, perhaps weak suited aces and some suited kings. It’s also weak high-card offsuit hands like QJo, up to and including AJo and KQo for some players.

What’s left when they call? Pocket pairs, big suited hands, AK, and AQ. Specifically, pocket pairs are a big part of the remaining range, and these players are calling preflop with pairs with a no-set-no-bet strategy.

So what are they likely to have on a J-9-2 flop? AK and AQ missed. Most pocket pairs missed. Unless they have AJs,
KJs, or a set, they’re folding. That’s most hands. So even if you get called preflop, you’ll still have an easily profitable continuation bet on many flops.

You may think, as some people do, that winning a limp or two isn’t worth it, and you shouldn’t risk a $5\times$ preflop raise on a bluff just to win one or two extra blinds. But that’s very flawed logic, especially since, as I mentioned above, the sort of player who limp-folds preflop will often check-fold on the flop even when the preflop steal attempt fails.

The fact is that limp-folding a lot is very bad play, and it’s exploited by upping your preflop raising frequency. The more they fold, the more hands you can likely get away with raising.

**Pitfalls To Avoid**

You’re going to get limp-reraised occasionally as a counter-measure. This will often represent a big pair or AK. This is nothing to be worried about, since you’re often just as happy to know early in the hand when your opponent has one of these monster hands.

You may get limp-reraised with a suited connector or some other hand that you would normally expect your opponent to fold. This is bad for you, but it’s unlikely your opponents will begin to do this with the frequency required to deter you from attacking their limps.

Savvy players behind you may pick up on what you’re doing and begin to 3-bet you. This is bad. It forces you to get somewhat back into line, though you can take countermeasures against light 3-betting (described later in the book).

Beware of letting these steal attempts blossom into big pots. You’re playing these hands because your opponents are nitty and fold too much. When they don’t fold, and especially
when they seem to want to put money in the pot, stay away. It can be tempting to push a hand like bottom two for the surprise factor. “He can’t know I’m raising eight-five, so he’ll never guess I have two pair.” No, he won’t guess you have two pair. But he’s only putting big money in the pot when bottom two is clobbered. That’s the point. Don’t level yourself into playing a big pot against a nit from a steal situation.

The rake. There’s no question that tight games are considerably tougher to beat at low stakes than a similar game would be at high stakes because of the rake. In tight games you get your edge by winning more small and medium pots than your opponents do. The rake structure often punishes this.

Here are my thoughts about adjusting your play for the rake.

Don’t.

If you’re playing at small stakes, it’s either because you’re a recreational/casual player, or it’s because you’re trying to get better and move up. Either way, learning how to play poker better is more important than the $5 per hour you could generate by tweaking your play for the rake. I find that people who obsess about the rake also tend to obsess about variance. Both of these obsessions convince these players to fold many marginal hands and “pass” on profitable situations. When you do that, you’re back to ABC. Which, as I said before, is a valid way to play. But presumably if you’re reading this book, you want more out of poker.

So just forget about the rake. It sucks. High rakes will definitely make it harder to build up a bankroll from smaller games. But I promise that you’re much better off long term with good skills and a light bankroll than with weak skills and a little bit more cash. So just forget the rake, concentrate on getting good at poker, and then find a solution for any bankroll problems later.
Who Exhibits This Trait?

Nits. Live nits, mostly. Many at the $1-$2 and $2-$5 levels in Las Vegas. You can’t miss them, since they’re the only ones limp-folding.

Also some weaker regular and non-regular players will limp-fold from time to time, particularly if the preflop raiser is someone who has been winning in the game. When you’ve limped in with Q♣7♣, the hand looks more hopeless when the preflop raiser is someone who has just stacked three people than someone who has just been stacked three times.

The Bottom Line

Limp-folding is bad. When people in your game are doing it, start raising relentlessly preflop until they do something about it.
**Most Poker Books Suck**

Right? You wouldn’t pay a dime for them because they aren’t worth a dime. They’re full of tired old—wrong—advice and fluff stories about the author that just wastes your time.

I know. Honestly, I started writing poker books because when I was trying to learn the game, so many I read sucked so badly.

This book doesn’t suck.

I hope that’s clear by this point. This book is fully-loaded with advice that will ultimately make you back at the tables many times over what you pay for the full, legit copy.

Please consider buying a copy. I depend on book sales to support my family. Sure, if everyone pirated my books beginning tomorrow, I could play poker 40 hours a week and support my family that way. But I’d never write another book. I enjoy writing and teaching. To me it’s a win-win. Win for the reader because you get better at poker. Win for me because I get to live life the way I want to.

Use discount code

**ThanksForSupportingAuthor**

http://edmillerpoker.com/
Trait No. 3. Tight Player Bet-Sizing Tells

Overview

Tight players often have a cluster of bet-sizing tells that are fairly consistent from player to player.

In all cases, a large bet indicates a strong hand that the tight player doesn’t want to fold. There’s a difference between what large absolute bet sizes mean versus large relative sizes.

A large absolute size means a bet that is large for the game, regardless of the current pot size. This varies with stakes and from game to game, but I’m talking about a bet large enough that you’ll see only one or two of similar size for the next fifty hands or so.

A large relative bet size is one that’s large for the size of the pot, but not necessarily large in an absolute sense. An abnormally large preflop raise, for instance.

A large absolute bet means a huge hand. In virtually all cases you have zero fold equity when your tight opponent makes a bet like this. On the river it means a lock hand (i.e., the nuts or a big full house). On the flop it means a hand the player wants to get all-in with. A set, maybe top two, maybe even just an overpair of aces on a dry board in a bloated multiway pot.

Sure, tight players like to fold. But when they have a hand they’re willing to make a large bet with, they rarely fold.

Large relative bets are a little different. Tight players make large relative bets when they have a strong, but vulnerable,
TIGHT PLAYER BET-SIZING TELLS

hand. Queens or jacks preflop is the most obvious example. Top pair on a coordinated flop is another one. The player is thinking, “My hand is likely best, but I don’t want anyone to draw out on me, so let me just bet big and take it down now.”

Small bets are more the norm for most small stakes players. A typical live small stakes player will make bets (relative to the pot size) that are smaller than they probably should be. As the norm, small bets often don’t tell you a lot about your opponent’s hand. But a small bet made in a situation where a tight player would have made a large bet with a big hand is telling. It denies a big hand, and it often marks the intention to fold to a raise.

Adjustment Summary

The main adjustment is that you fold most hands to unusually large bets. Since large absolute bets mean very large hands, you rarely have to pay off on the river against a tight player with these bet-sizing tells.

Here’s an example of a hand a student of mine played where he used this bet-sizing tell to find a fold in what might otherwise have been a tough situation.

It was a $2-$5 live game with $1,500 stacks. My student opened for $20 with J-J. There were a few folds, and then a tight player 3-bet to $60 from one off the button. The blinds folded, and my student called.

A preflop 3-bet from a tight player usually means business, but with stacks this deep, it’s easily worth $40 to see a flop. With shallow stacks, (less than $500) I might consider folding the jacks.

The pot is $127. The flop came 9-6-3 rainbow. My student checked, and then this player bet $150.
This bet size is unusually large. Sure, one could argue that the deep stacks might call for larger bet sizes early in the hand, but it’s unlikely the player was thinking this way. This bet is both relatively large (bigger than pot) and fairly large in an absolute sense. It strongly indicates an overpair, and likely a fairly good one.

My student folded, and the fellow showed K-K.

If you think about it, this should have been a dream scenario for the guy with K-K. He flopped an overpair on a dry board against a slightly smaller overpair. If the player were playing a balanced strategy free from bet-sizing tells and with appropriate bluffing sprinkled in, my student would have been forced to call some bets with his second-best hand. But because the bet-sizing tell is quite reliable (combined with a strategy that doesn’t include enough bluffing), my student was able to make this “tight” fold quite easily.

The key here really is the bet size. With a hand like A-K, the tight player may still have bet the flop, but he would undoubtedly have bet less than the pot size. I would expect a bet size closer to $70 with A-K from this type of player.

While folding to the big bets is the most useful adjustment, and it’s the one that will arise most frequently, you can also adjust in two other ways against a player who gives off so much information with his bet sizing.

The first adjustment only works when you’re very deep. The $1,500 stacks of the above example are about the right size for this play. When the big bet comes relatively early in the hand, such that there’s still a lot of money behind, you can call knowing that you’re behind, but expecting to be able to bluff successfully enough cards to show a profit.

Let’s change the above example slightly. Instead of a 9-6-3 rainbow flop, let’s say it was T♣ 7♠ 5♠ with two spades. With a $150 flop bet my read doesn’t change—it’s still likely an overpair. But instead of J-J, let’s suppose you held 5♣ 4♠.
This gives you bottom pair, a bad backdoor straight draw, and a backdoor club draw. Your draws themselves don’t really warrant calling such a large bet (unless you were 100 percent certain you could stack your opponent if you improved). But you have some fairly important information about your opponent’s hand—namely, he’s likely to have an overpair and fairly unlikely to have a flush draw, straight draw, or a set. The preflop 3-bet combined with the oversized flop bet screams overpair.

If the turn is a spade, you can represent a flush. If the turn is a 5, you can likely win a big pot. If the turn is 6 or 8, you’ll pick up outs, and the card may be scary enough (particularly in conjunction with a scary river card like one that puts a possible flush or four to a straight on board) that you can force a fold.

So it’s the fact that your opponent is marked with likely at most one pair, along with the fact that the board can turn scary, along with the fact that you have plenty of money behind that makes playing against the big bet worthwhile.

The final adjustment you can make against an opponent with these bet-sizing tells is to bluff-raise small bets in situations where your opponent almost certainly would have made a bigger bet with a big hand.

For example, you are in position, and your opponent has been betting a king-high board. The third flush card comes in on the river, and your opponent makes a bet that is quite small both in an absolute sense and especially in comparison to the pot size. You’ve seen this player make big bets with big hands in the past. This bet is, therefore, likely to be a blocking bet with a hand like A-K. Your opponent doesn’t want to check his hand, because he fears that you will make a big bet and he won’t know whether you’re bluffing or not. So instead, he makes a small bet, reasoning that you would raise only with the goods.
Pitfalls To Avoid

These bet-sizing tells are very natural. Bet big with big hands. Bet smaller with smaller hands and with bluffs. Because they are so natural, many players exhibit them faithfully. When I play live no-limit, I see these tells in every session, and they frequently help me to find the right play.

The main pitfall, obviously, is that some players may reverse these tells on you. In particular, many hands arise where it becomes clear by the river that neither player is likely to have a strong hand. Some savvy players have learned to overbet the pot in these situations, knowing that the uncommonly large bet looks like strength. Likewise, some players have learned to make small bets when they perceive their opponent to have a weak range of hands. The small bet is designed to look like a blocking bet and induce a bluff-raise.

You’re unlikely to see either of these plays if your main game is $1-$2, $1-$3, or $2-$5 live no-limit hold’em. But there are players around who will try them, so be aware.

It might have occurred to you at this point that you should be making these plays (overbet bluffing and betting small to induce bluff-raises). I caution against making either play. Betting small to induce a bluff raise, in particular, is a fool’s errand at small stakes live games because the vast majority of players won’t even consider taking the bait. The overbet bluff has somewhat better prospects, but many small stakes players call too often when “obviously” beaten, so be careful.

Against tough opponents these two plays should absolutely be part of your playbook. (Later in the book I discuss the players you should be trying these plays out against.)

The other pitfall is that sometimes an overbet shove on the flop (or less commonly the turn) from a tight player means a big draw rather than a big made hand. It’s something to be aware of.
Who Exhibits This Trait?

Most small stakes regulars who play on the tight side show these bet-sizing tells. These players tend to be risk-averse, so it comes naturally to them to bet more when they think they’re likely ahead. Large bets early in a hand are often intended to end the hand, and this desire to end hands prematurely stems from a generalized fear of being outdrawn or outplayed. Players who play from fear tend to be a bit nitty.

These tells are universal enough that I will expect any tight regular-type player to exhibit them until I observe otherwise. (E.g., I see the player make a large bluff or a bold value bet with a marginal hand.)

The Bottom Line

Amateur players betray a lot of information in their bet sizes. Big bets in an absolute sense are unlikely to be bluffs and quite likely to be very big hands. Big bets in a relative, but not absolute, sense are likely to be good hands the player fears getting outdrawn. Small bets frequently don’t tell you much, but a small bet made in a situation that would usually elicit a big bet from a big hand often indicates a willingness to fold.
Trait No. 4. Bet-Folding

NOTE: The information in this section is extremely important. Reread it two dozen times if you have to.

So far the tight player traits we’ve discussed have been fairly straightforward. Tight players don’t like to felt without the nuts. They like to fold weak hands early on, even after they’ve put a little money in the pot. And tight players often vary their bet sizes according to their hand strength due to the fear of getting outdrawn and the fear of betting the worse hand.

Altogether these traits point to the same set of adjustments. Don’t call their big bets. The big bets are saved for big hands, so calling it off becomes very bad. Don’t value bet too thinly either. Tight players’ threshold for calling down is higher than most players, so you can’t get much value from medium-strength hands.

Bluff more on the small and medium bets. These players will abandon small pots frequently, so take lots of stabs. Use preflop raises with weak hands to build pots before you steal them.

With very tight, or nitty, players, this is nearly the entire recipe to destroying them. Never pay them off. In fact, basically never play a big pot with them even if you’re the one betting. Instead, play lots of hands preflop and take frequent stabs at the small and medium pots. Since these players aren’t actively competing for the small pots, you’ll pick up far more than your share. And because you’re not losing big pots in the process, you’ll have a strong, consistent edge.
TAG, or tight-aggressive, players are a little tougher to beat. Why? Because they are also taking frequent stabs at the small and medium pots. Like nits, TAGs are tight early in hands, and you can steal blinds and win pots on the flop with continuation bets. But these players also try to steal blinds and make continuation bets. Without taking things to the next level, it’s hard to get an edge. They won’t spew in big pots, and they’ll at least compete for the small pots.

To get an edge, you have to understand a key TAG concept, the bet-fold.

Overview

Bet-folding is simple. It’s betting with the intention of folding to a raise. It’s raising preflop with the intention of folding to a 3-bet. Continuation betting the flop with overcards, planning to fold if raised. Or it’s betting top pair for value on the turn, again intending to fold to a raise.

Bet-folding is the TAG’s bread-and-butter play. In fact, it nearly defines the archetype. These players are aggressive. They bet frequently. But they’re also tight. They fold frequently. The only way to simultaneously bet frequently and fold frequently is to bet-fold. If you replace the bet-folds with bet-calls, you become loose. If you replace the bet-folds with check-folds, you become a nit.

Theoretically, bet-folding is a perfectly legitimate line. Why would you choose to bet-fold a hand? Well, let’s separate the two actions. First comes the bet. Why would you bet a hand?

There are three reasons to bet in no-limit hold’em, but the most important one is to get worse hands to call. The value bet. You think you have the better hand, and you want your opponent to call with a worse hand. A worse hand can be a
weaker made hand. It can be a draw. Or it can even be a float or a bluff. (If you’re hoping to get bluffed, then you are betting not to get called by a worse hand, but to get raised by a worse hand. It’s theoretically similar.)

Say you bet top pair on the turn. Generally you would do so only if you thought you would be called the majority of the time by a worse hand. For instance, if you bet A-K on a A-7-3-Q board, you would be expecting that *more than half the time you are called*, your hand is ahead.

Why is this? Because you’re proposing an even-money bet with your opponent. I’ll put up $100. You put up $100. We’ll see another card and see who wins. This bet is profitable if you win it more than half the time. (With cards to come, this half the time threshold is not hard-and-fast because there are other considerations that affect the total value of the bet. But 50 percent is still a decent place to start analyzing a bet.)

Note that you’re merely proposing a bet. Your opponent has the option to accept or reject it. To be profitable, you have to win more than half the time your opponent *accepts*. The times your opponent rejects it are not relevant.

(Again, when your opponent rejects the bet, i.e., folds, you eliminate the chance you’d have been outdrawn which, of course, has some value. But in no-limit hold’em, this chance usually doesn’t affect the value of the bet too much. In no-limit, bets tend to be fairly large compared to the size of the pot. And in hold’em, because it’s a community card game, hands that are ahead on the turn usually don’t get outdrawn. So in no-limit hold’em, you’re making a large bet to secure against a small chance of being outdrawn in a pot that’s roughly the same size as the bet. It has value, but the average player overestimates the value. Put another way, for most no-limit players, the emotional impact of getting outdrawn looms larger than the financial reality of it.)
So we’re betting because we think that roughly more than half the time we’ll get called by a worse hand.

Then we get raised. With most players, this raise carries a ton of new information. Against many small-stakes players, it means we’re beaten with near certainty. Thus, a fold. With the information we started the betting round knowing, we had a bet. But then with the new information of a raise, we have a fold. Bet-fold.

Bet-folding is an incredibly valuable tool against loose, non-aggressive opponents. Loose players love to call bets with weak hands. They also tend to raise only with strong hands. So there’s a wide range of bad hands that they’ll call value bets with. But when they raise, they really mean business. The bet-fold perfectly exploits the predictable traits of this common bad player archetype.

In fact, it performs so well that TAGs often learn to live on the bet-fold line alone. They have developed essentially two poker skills. First, they’ve learned not to overplay marginal hands. They play tight preflop, and they don’t build big pots with iffy hands. Second, they abuse the bet-fold line to exploit lesser players. In most no-limit hold’em games, these two skills alone are enough to generate a consistent edge.

If you are like most people whom I expect to read this book, these are likely your two greatest poker skills as well. You know how not to aimlessly spew off your stack. And you know how to bet and fold to a raise. Pay attention, because you’re about to learn how to exploit yourself and the legion of other players who play just like you do.

**Adjustment Summary**

An over-reliance on bet-fold lines creates unbalanced hand ranges. What’s an unbalanced range?
At any given point in a hand, your opponent should be able to name a range of hands you could have based on your action to that point. Say you raise preflop and someone calls. The flop comes Q-9-4 rainbow. Your opponent checks, and you bet two-thirds of the pot. From your opponent’s perspective, what can you have?

You can have top pair or an overpair. Less likely (but, critically, not ruled out by your actions thus far), you can have a set or two pair. You can have an unimproved pocket pair or a pair of nines. You can have a straight draw—open-ended or gutshot. You can have a missed hand such as A-8 or an even weaker one like 7-6.

Now for the $64,000 question. Is this range balanced, or is it unbalanced?

The answer is that it could be either, and it depends on exactly how many weak hands you tend to play this way (raise preflop, bet on this flop). An unbalanced range is one that is too heavily weighted toward one hand type or another. Specifically, it’s a range that can be exploited by taking a single, simple action with nearly any hand.

What do I mean by that?

Let’s assume that instead of being a TAG, you are a loose and maniacal player. You will raise preflop with any two cards, and your opponents know that about you. And when checked to on the flop, you will bet every time. If you play this way, then your range on the flop is extremely unbalanced.

You might say to yourself, “Unbalanced? If a guy can have any two cards at any time, isn’t that balanced? You can never put him on a hand.” This would be true, except for one simple fact. Most hands miss the flop. When you’re up against someone who can have two random cards on any flop, the vast majority of the time, your opponent will have a hand that most players would consider to be weak—no pair or one small pair.
So if you were to put this player’s hands into one of three buckets—weak, medium, and strong—you’d have a lot hands in the weak bucket, some in the medium bucket, and a relatively small percentage of hands in the strong bucket.

Any range that is unbalanced in this way is guaranteed to be exploitable, and the exploit is simple. You bet or raise frequently against the range. If the player has weak hands and tends to call with them, then you value bet very thinly and relentlessly. If the player has weak hands and tends to fold them, you bluff a lot.

Ranges can also be unbalanced in the other direction, with too many strong hands. When your opponent has too many strong hands, the exploit is also simple. You fold. This is the problem nitty players have. They create hand ranges that are unbalanced to strong hands, and as a result you can simply fold whenever they want to put money in the pot. Keep in mind that to create an overly strong range, you must necessarily fold most of your weak and medium hands. Hence, nitty players fold too much in small and medium pots, and the strong ranges that remain are unbalanced and exploitable.

Balanced ranges contain a mix of weak, medium, and strong hands. The exact weighting among these buckets depends on how much money is in the pot. Generally speaking, early in the hand and in small pots, your ranges should have higher weightings of weak hands. And later in hands when there’s been a lot of action, your ranges should have higher weightings of strong hands.

And so the bottom line. Early on and in small pots, more weak hands. Late and in big pots, more strong hands. But to build a balanced range, you want the mix to be unexploitable. You want to have enough strong hands in your range early on to deter opponents from simply bluffing like crazy. And you want enough weak hands in your range late that you can be
bluffing and therefore can force your opponents to pay you off.

So that’s the gist of the difference between balanced and unbalanced ranges. When your opponent’s range is unbalanced, you can nearly always take one particular action and expect it to be right. When your opponent’s range is balanced, you can’t do that.

And now back to what I said in the first sentence of this section. An over-reliance on bet-fold lines creates unbalanced ranges. Why is that?

The bigger the pot, the stronger your hand range should be to remain balanced. Betting makes the pot bigger. Thus, your betting hands should be, on average, stronger than your checking hands. Duh, you say, right?

Here’s the thing. TAGs have learned that they can exploit players who fold too much by reversing this basic principle. In many situations they bet virtually all of their hands that have no value whatsoever, relying on all the folds to turn a profit. The only hands they check are ones that have some showdown value. Here’s a specific example.

It’s a tight $1-$2 game like one you might find online. Everyone folds to a TAG who raises to $6 from one off the button. You call in the small blind.

The flop is \( \spadesuit K \heartsuit 7 \spadesuit 5 \spadesuit \). You check. The TAG bets $10. What does this bet tell you about the hand the TAG might have?

Very little. Most TAGs would look at a flop of this texture—rainbow with two low cards and a single, disjointed high card—and think, “Great flop to continuation bet.” TAGs will bet this flop with hands like 9-8, A-6, 3-3, and so forth.

In fact, if such a TAG were to actually check this flop, I would give him some credit for a hand. While he might be sandbagging with a monster like K-K, more likely I’d expect a check to be a medium-strength pair like 7-6 or A-5. Betting these medium pairs rarely folds out better hands and also
rarely gets calls from weaker hands. So checking makes a good bit of sense.

Back to the betting range, the TAG has a mix of strong hands (kings mostly) and a lot of junk (total air). Couple this with a wide preflop opening range from one off the button, and we’re looking at mostly junk. That is, an unbalanced range.

The TAG is planning to bet-fold many, if not most, of his betting hands on the flop. So what should you do? (Hint: It starts with an ‘r’.)

I remember a time when raising continuation bets was a cutting edge play. The TAG regulars in the online games were all merrily continuation betting the flop, relying on their fold equity against unthinking players and other TAGs to make the play profitable. And then some sharp cookie would come along and start raising continuation bets. For a while, these sharpies absolutely cleaned up. They vacuumed up pots on the flop like crazy.

This play is not cutting edge anymore. The best players all know about it and use it, and they have adopted counter-measures. But just because it isn’t cutting edge doesn’t mean it isn’t still profitable when used intelligently.

More importantly, every time one of your opponents makes a continuation bet, you should be thinking, “Is his range unbalanced? Do I have an auto-raise here?” More often than you might expect, the answer to both questions is yes.

Raising continuation bets isn’t the only play here. TAGs bet-fold in many other situations as well. On the turn, TAGs learn to bet-fold with top pair. They bet top pair, but then assume when raised that top pair is no good. They bet-fold the river too. Any time your opponent can be bet-folding many hands, you have a potential auto-raise situation.
How do you identify bet-fold situations, besides the fairly obvious example of the player who raises a wide range preflop and then continuation bets all of the air?

It requires some hand reading skills.

You’re looking for situations where your opponents have a fairly weak betting range. One easy way to spot these situations against some TAGs is to use bet-sizing tells. Remember that many players will make extra-large bets on the late streets when they have a monster. Therefore, when these players don’t make a large bet, their betting range is weighted more toward weaker hands.

You can find these situations even against players who don’t exhibit bet-sizing tells. Here’s an example.

In my book *How To Read Hands At No-Limit Hold’em*, I talk about the limiting turn call. The idea is that a flat call, rather than a raise, on the turn often denies a very strong hand. This is because the board is usually at least a little scary on the turn, and most players with strong hands will want to charge opponents to draw out.

It’s a $2-$5 game with $1,500 stacks. You raise to $20 from early position with A♦J♦. Two players call from behind, and the big blind calls.

The flop comes Q♦8♠7♦. The blind checks, and you bet $60 into the $82 pot. One player calls behind, and the other two players fold. The caller is a TAG player who bets rivers for value thinly when checked to.

The turn is the T♣. You bet $150 into the $212 pot. Your opponent calls.

The river is the 7♠, making the final board Q♦8♠7♠T♣7♠. You check, and your opponent bets $200 into the $512 pot. After the $200 bet, there’s still over $1,000 behind.

What does this betting range look like? Except for specifically 8-7, it’s unlikely to include a full house. Why?
Because he almost certainly would have raised either the flop or the turn if he held a set. The board on the turn is getting scary. There’s a possible flush draw out, and lots of straight draws are available. Most players would want to “charge the draws” with a big hand on a board like this one.

Yet he didn’t raise. This turn call limits the top end of his range. Unless he’s a little bit crazy, he doesn’t have Q-Q, T-T, 8-8, 7-7, J-9, or Q-T.

He’s more likely to have a hand like A-Q, K-Q, Q-J, or a draw. All the draws missed, which makes this a relatively weak betting range on the river. He’s almost certainly planning to bet-fold the river with a lot of his range.

This is a situation where betting out as a bluff on the river might be less effective than check-raise bluffing. If you simply bet the river, I’d often expect to be called by hands like A-Q and K-Q. But if you check the river, you can likely get your opponent off these same hands with a big check-raise. And checking A-J isn’t too bad since it’s conceivable you might even win a showdown with the hand.

The key to the play is that our opponent has done something in the hand that denies the strongest holdings. Any bets our opponent makes after that point will frequently be bet-folds.

If you haven’t done so, and you’d like more help identifying bet-fold situations, read my book *How To Read Hands At No-Limit Hold’em.*

**Pitfalls To Avoid**

There are a few pitfalls here. First, some players simply don’t bet-fold very often. Once they put money out there, they like to defend it. Bet-folding frequently is not at all a universal
trait, so don’t go running these plays on any old tight player expecting a lot of folds.

Second, attacking bet-folds is a leveling play. By that, I mean that this play isn’t designed to work against weak and unthinking players (those who think on level zero or level one, if you are familiar with these terms). It’s designed to work against players who are trying to exploit weak and unthinking players. These players tend to be smarter than your average bear, and they might catch on to what you’re doing.

Many people have learned to play a TAG game from reading books and watching videos without having put too much thought into why they’re playing the way they are. They just make the plays they do because they know they work—or at least other players have made them work. These are the ideal players to attack, because they won’t catch on quickly to what you’re doing. All they know is that they’re supposed to bet the river with top pair and fold to a raise, and so they do, faithfully.

Other TAGs are sharper. If they notice that they are having to bet-fold against you more than they expect, they’ll adjust. They’ll start bluffing less and bet-calling lighter. These two changes together will have the effect of sharply reducing the percentage of time they are folding to your raises. In the extreme, some players will stop bet-folding to you almost entirely, while they continue to bet-fold against weak players.

Fortunately if you’re paying attention, you can pick up on this adjustment fairly quickly. If you get called and your opponent shows up with a hand that seems far weaker than you’d expect, the jig is up. Now it’s time to exploit your opponent’s new bet-calling fetish by raising thinner for value.

Also you can get hints that your opponent is adjusting if he starts checking down some hands that don’t have showdown value. If you happen to win a small checked-down pot against
a TAG holding, say, ace-high, then it means your opponent chose not to bet-fold with a hand he otherwise might have.

Despite the pitfalls, however, don’t be shy. Exploiting bet-folds is one of the surest ways to beat a TAG, and if you want to win playing online, it’s a skill you simply must master.

**Who Exhibits This Trait**

TAGs. The tighter and the more aggressive players get, the more bet-folding they have to do. There’s no way around it. If you want to be both tight and aggressive, you have to bet-fold.

Now you may be thinking, “Don’t I want to be tight and aggressive? Isn’t that the right way to play?” Sure. Being a TAG is a perfectly good way to win money at no-limit hold’em. Which means you’ll be bet-folding.

I bet-fold all the time. As I said before, it’s a play that nearly perfectly exploits the errors many amateur players make. But when I’m playing hands against smarter players, I have to watch how I use the play. If I overuse it, I just might get exploited.

But don’t be paranoid about being exploited. As I said at the start of the book, playing to win is a lot more lucrative than playing not to lose. You want to exploit your opponents as thoroughly as possible, even though it leaves you wide open to counter-exploitation from smart opponents.

Most of the time, you’ll never have to worry about it, since your opponents won’t be sharp enough to make the right adjustments. When you finally come upon someone who you think is trying to punish you, adjust. You either switch tables to one where you can exploit your opponents without fear of reprisal, or you switch up your strategy to protect yourself. But don’t adjust until someone forces you to. Doing so just gives away edges you don’t have to give up.
The Bottom Line

Bet-folding is the TAG player’s bread-and-butter. It’s also thoroughly exploitable if you can predict when your opponents are doing it. Raise your tight opponent’s bets when their ranges are full of weak, potential bluffing hands. Also raise their bets when they have removed the top hands from their range by checking or calling in a meaningful situation.
That’s cool. That’s why I published this excerpt. But I wanted to point out that this book is clearly worth your time. And if it’s worth your time, it’s also worth buying.

Use discount code

ThanksForSupportingAuthor

http://edmillerpoker.com/
Trait No. 5. Pot-Controlling

Overview

Ah, pot control. The no-limit concept most abused by tight and nitty players.

The idea is simple. You have a made hand of some sort. It’s not such a good made hand that you can make three big bets and expect someone with a worse hand to pay all three. No, it’s just an ok made hand. Since you can’t just bet, bet, bet and get called by worse hands, you check a street instead. You check to disguise your hand. You check to avoid getting bluffed. And you check to avoid ending up on the short end of the risk-reward stick.

It’s a legitimate concept. But it’s one that has a little bit too much appeal for all the nitty players of the world. “You mean all those times I’m scared to death that my opponent has me beat or that I’m going to get bluffed out of a big pot, I can just check it down and that’s okay? Think of how much variance I’ll cut out! I’m going to start checking everything.”

Tight players are positively addicted to pot-controlling lines. Unfortunately, pot-controlling is not all it’s cracked up to be in small stakes games. Pot-controlling is intended to maximize value against tight players who bluff intelligently. After all, the basic assumption of pot-controlling is that your opponents aren’t calling you with many worse hands, but they are willing to put you to the test in big pots when scare cards come.

In small stakes games, however, players call too much and don’t bluff enough. So by pot-controlling you’re often just
shooting yourself in the foot. Better than pot-controlling in many small stakes situations is bet-folding. We’ve already talked about bet-folding.

So now let’s talk about pot-controlling. Your tight opponents will do it frequently. In position, your opponents will check back flops or turns (and usually also rivers) with good showdown value. Out of position, your opponents may try to control the pot by making small blocking bets.

**Adjustment Summary**

Here’s the thing about pot-controlling lines. They tend to deny a strong hand. This means that tight players who are pot-controlling tend to be unwilling to play big pots with their hands. (This is, after all, the primary reason these players are pot-controlling in the first place—fear of losing a big pot with their hand.)

You can thwart pot-controlling lines with overbets. Here’s how it works.

It’s a $1-$2 game with $300 stacks. A player limps in, and a tight player raises to $10 on the button. You call in the big blind, and the limper calls also.

The flop is $A\spadesuit T\spadesuit 8\spadesuit$. You check, the limper checks, and the preflop raiser checks.

The turn is the $7\heartsuit$. You bet $30 into the $31 pot. The limper folds, and the tight player calls.

The river is the $8\diamond$. You bet $150 into the $91 pot.

Say you have $Q\diamond J\diamond$ and therefore you’re bluffing. By betting $150 to win the $91 pot, you have to succeed over 62 percent of the time for the bluff to be profitable. You’ll find, however, that this river bluff succeeds considerably more often than that against most tight players. Why?
By playing this way, the tight player is either pot controlling or drawing. He raises preflop, but then checks back the flop and merely flat calls the turn. On this coordinated board, by failing to “protect his hand” on either the flop or turn, he denies a strong hand. He’s likely got either a busted draw, a hand like K-K, Q-Q, J-J, 9-9, or perhaps even an ace with a kicker he’s not particularly proud of.

He doesn’t want to lose a big pot. He’s trying to control the pot size by taking the line he’s taken. So just overbet the river and force him to make a big call. He won’t—at least he won’t call 40 percent of the time.

Why the overbet? Tight players use pot controlling lines because they are worried about getting bluffed. So opponents in pot control mode are naturally suspicious of bluffs. If you throw a half-pot bet out there, you’re going to get snapped off. It plays directly into the tight player’s plans: Keep the pot small. Prevent big bluffs. Induce small bluffs. Snap them off.

The overbet pulls a tight player away from the plan. Also, it mimics lines that typical small stakes players take only with strong hands. For instance, if I were playing as the button in the hand above, and I held A-K, I would snap-fold to the $150 bet against the vast majority of $1-$2 players. This is a betting line they would take only with the J-9 straight or a full house. So you can use your tight opponents’ hand reading skills against them because whenever they’ve seen this line in the past, it’s meant strength.

This adjustment takes advantage of a particular trait of many tight players. They play too straightforwardly—not bluffing enough, taking lines that eliminate strong hands from their ranges too often—which means that they betray too much information with each action. Furthermore, tight players tend to have folding thresholds for most of their hands. They will endure a certain amount of action with a hand of a given strength, but fold when the action gets heavier than that.
Exploiting this is easy. Process the information the tight player gives you, then bet more than they’re likely to be willing to call. Because no-limit allows you to overbet at any time, it’s impossible to truly control the size of the pot, and you can pull tight players out of their comfort zones on nearly any hand. Furthermore, even though a tight player knows they’re being pulled from their comfort zone, rarely will one make the correct counter-adjustments.

**Pitfalls To Avoid**

There aren’t too many common pitfalls with this play. It frankly drives tight players crazy. They hate calling big bets with pot-controlling hands.

Obviously, don’t overuse it. Part of the power of this play is that it convincingly represents strength. If you’re overbetting three times an hour, even the nits will notice and give it less credit.

And don’t use it against calling stations who specialize in calling big bets in ridiculous spots. Hopefully you wouldn’t look for plays to use against calling stations in the section about adjusting to tight players.

Occasionally you will happen upon tight players who are so suspicious of getting bluffed that even though they want desperately to fold to this bet they’ll call anyway. Usually these are tight players on tilt.

**Who Exhibits This Trait**

Nearly every no-limit player takes pot control lines sometimes. Nitty players tend to take them more frequently than TAGs (who use the bet-fold more than nits do).
I would say I use this play against small stakes “regs” more than I do against any other player type. These are players who have enough hand reading skills to see the overbet as both out of the ordinary and as likely strong. The nittier regs are the best targets.

You can also catch LAG players with this play. It comes up in pots where a LAG has been uncharacteristically passive, checking one or two streets. This line from a LAG often indicates weak showdown value. The LAG plans to snap off a normal-sized bet, but the overbet makes them think twice.

**The Bottom Line**

Your opponents will take pot control lines to get to showdown and to avoid being bluffed when they hold marginal made hands. Pot control lines are often not well balanced and contain too many hands the player is unwilling to felt (or play a big pot with). You can exploit this unwillingness by forcing the issue with an overbet. Unless your opponents know to expect this play from you, if you choose your spots reasonably well, you’ll see a high success rate.
Trait No. 6. Refusing To Fire A Second Or Third Barrel

Overview

An optimal strategy for no-limit involves a lot of multi-street bluffing. You fire a bluff on one street, and then if called, some percentage of the time you fire again. Then, if called, some percentage of the time you fire yet again.

I call this multi-street bluffing process running your opponent through the gauntlet of bluffs. When your opponent tries to get to showdown against you when you bluff with near-correct frequencies, each successive call becomes harder and harder. Your opponent should know that your bluffing frequency goes down with each bet, so therefore every time you bet the chance his hand is good drops. But your bluffing frequency should never be so low that your opponent can ever know for relative certain whether his hand is good or not.

It takes a certain amount of guts, however, to bluff correctly. In a number of circumstances, you have to be willing to play bluffs in the same way you’d play the nuts. This means following up a routine flop bet with a large turn bet and a quite large river bet.

Many players simply don’t have the guts to do this—or worse than that they don’t even think to do it when the proper situations arise. When you’re against someone who refuses to follow up bluffs at the correct frequency with bigger bluffs, you have a huge hole to exploit. In the extreme case, the entire
principle of stack leverage, with early small bets threatening later large bets, goes completely out the window. This allows you to make many more speculative calls and also to steal a lot of pots you shouldn’t normally be allowed to steal.

Adjustment Summary

First let’s look at someone who doesn’t fire second barrels. This player will raise preflop and get called. Then this player will fire a continuation bet on the flop and get called. On the turn, however, this player bets again only with value hands and almost never as a bluff. With all marginal made hands and with draws and air, this player checks back the turn.

Boy, is this trait easy to exploit. The simple adjustment is to call nearly all flops. Here’s how it works.

This player opens in a $2-$5 game to $15 from three off the button. The button calls, and you call in the big blind with Q♦ J♠.

The flop is K♦ 9♠ 3♣. You check, the preflop raiser bets $25, and the button folds. You’ve got a gutshot and a backdoor flush draw.

Call and check the turn. Your opponent’s turn action will tell you what sort of hand you’re up against. If he makes a big turn bet, he’s likely got something like A-A, A-K, or a set. If he checks it back, he’s likely got something like T-T, 7-7, A-Q, or worse.

If he checks the turn, you’ll usually bluff the river. On this relatively draw-free board, your hand looks like a king to your opponent. Most tight players with this trait will give you credit for the king and lay down lesser hands. (Folding the river, in fact, is part of the strategy many players use when they have this trait. They are trying to “lose the minimum” on all their marginal hands.)
If he bets the turn, you just give him credit and fold. Unless you make your straight, of course, in which case I would tend to bet fairly large on the turn and river. The reason to bet rather than to check the turn is that, because of your opponent’s trait, you aren’t inducing bluffs when you check. So your opponent, by and large, is betting or calling your bets with roughly the same set of hands. And this way, by betting, you get to control the bet sizes rather than allowing your opponent to possibly bet smaller than you would have. (Of course you could check-raise, but you run the risk of blowing your opponent off a one pair hand. You’ll typically make more against your opponent’s entire range of hands if you simply bet big on the turn and river.)

Why is this line profitable? You’re getting nearly 3-to-1 on the flop call, and then you’re getting almost perfect information on the turn about whether you’ll be able to win the pot or not. Since your opponent will hold less than top pair on this flop more than half the time, you can very profitably call getting 3-to-1, knowing that the turn will get checked through more than half the time and that you can often have a very profitable river bluff.

Furthermore, you have a gutshot to the nuts to outdraw your opponent when he does have a king or better, and when the turn gets checked through, you have two chances to make at least a pair of jacks which could well be the best hand once the turn is checked through.

You can also check-call with pocket pairs like 88 on a flop like K-9-3 rainbow. If your opponent bets the turn, your hand is no good. If he checks, you’re probably good. Or you can possibly throw out a little blocking river bet to get nittier players to fold hands like T-T.

Against players with rudimentary hand-reading skills, you can fairly easily represent top pair by check-calling from out of position on uncoordinated flops. For instance, if you check-
call on a $\text{A\spadesuit}7\spadesuit4\spadesuit$ flop, these players will tend to give you credit for an ace. If the turn gets checked through, you can maybe half-pot the river and expect to get well more than enough folds to justify the play.

If you want to try to run this play as a bluff on a more coordinated board, and a scare card comes on the turn, you can often check the turn, let your opponent check it through, and then overbet the river. Once the scare card comes, your opponent’s check doesn’t deny top pair as strongly, but an overbet is often enough to get them off even top pair on a scary board.

There are a number of different possibilities, but when you’re up against a player who doesn’t double barrel, you can call a lot more flops, even from out of position, and then use the information you get on the turn to play as perfectly as possible against your opponent’s range.

Now say your opponent will fire the turn, but he almost never follows up on the river if called. This trait is not as thoroughly exploitable as refusing to even fire the turn, but again you can call more frequently on the turn since you’ll rarely have a tough river decision.

For instance, say someone raises preflop to $20, one fairly loose player calls behind, and you call in the big blind with $\text{Q\spadesuit T\spadesuit}$.

The flop is $\text{T\heartsuit 3\heartsuit 2\diamondsuit}$. You check, the preflop raiser bets $40 into the $67 pot, the loose player folds, and you call.

The turn is the $\text{K\spadesuit}$. You check, and your opponent bets $80 into $147 on this obvious turn barrel ing card. You can fairly safely call now and check-fold the river. If your opponent was barrel ing the turn, he’ll just check the river back, and you’ll win. If he bets, you can expect that at least he caught the king, and you can safely fold.

If your opponent didn’t have this trait, and you’d have to fear a river barrel, then the turn call becomes much dicier.
This is what stack leverage does in no-limit hold’em—it makes trying to call down with medium-strength but very beatable hands a tricky proposition. But when a player simply refuses to fire barrels on the turn or the river, stack leverage all but disappears because you never have to fear losing a big pot with your marginal hand.

When you have position, you can call even lighter in these spots, floating the flop with all sorts of junk, and calling quite light on the turn. You can call especially lighter on the turn, since position gives you the opportunity to turn your hand into a bluff should your opponent check the river.

For instance, say you have 6♠5♠ on the button. You’re playing $2-$5 with $1,200 stacks. A tight player who barrels turns but not rivers opens for $15, and you call. The big blind calls.

The flop comes J♣5♣4♠. The preflop raiser bets $30 into the $47 pot. You call, and the big blind folds.

The turn is the K♠. The preflop raiser bets $80. This is a thoroughly reasonable card to bluff-raise, given that it’s one I would expect your opponent to barrel with many hands, and it also gives you a flush draw. But when your opponent will tell you on the river whether he has a value hand or not, strongly consider just calling to delay your decision until you get the information.

The river is the 7♣. Your opponent checks. I think you can turn your hand into a bluff here. Assuming your bet is large enough, you’re unlikely to get called by any hand of a pair of jacks or weaker. And your opponent is a fair dog to have a king or better after this action.

I would indeed fire the bluff rather than try to rely on the showdown value of the pair of fives, because if you check it down, you’ll frequently lose to hands like 9-9 and J-T.
Pitfalls to Avoid

This line (failing to barrel the turn) can mimic a pot-control line. If you decide you want to bluff the river when the turn gets checked through, weigh the chance your opponent is giving up versus the chance he’s pot-controlling.

For instance, say a player opens for $20, and you call in the big blind.

The flop is \textbf{K♥8♠3♦}. You check, he bets, you call.

The turn is the \textbf{9♣}. You check, he checks.

In addition to checking back his air, does this player also check back hands like K-T, K-J, and K-Q for pot control? If so, you may still have a profitable river bluff since your opponent will have air more often than top pair, but when you size the bluff, you might want to make it a small bet (to mimic a thin value bet with a king) that will get your opponent off hands less than a king, but will concede a call to a king. Or you possibly might try an overbet to get your opponent off the pot-controlled top pairs (particularly if the river card is potentially scary).

In any event, the more your opponent checks back top pair or better hands, the less valuable the information you get on the turn becomes. This dynamic may favor check-raise bluffing the flop over check-calling the flop and waiting for the river to bluff.

Also it’s important, if you do start to call these flop and turn bets lighter due to the lack of barreling, that you recognize which of your hands can tolerate a showdown and which hands are too weak to show down and will require you to bluff.

For instance, if you hold Q-Q on a J-4-3-K board, you can call the turn and check the river confident that your hand will usually win a showdown when your opponent checks the river back.
Whereas, say you check-call a K-5-3 flop with A-4. Your opponent checks back a T on the turn. You catch a 4 on the river. Despite pairing, you may want to throw out a bluff anyway to avoid losing to hands like 8-8 and T-9.

**Who Exhibits This Trait**

Nits and many TAGs are limp about firing barrels. They can muster some aggression on the cheap streets, but when bluffing begins to cost them a quarter or half of their stack, they just can’t pull the trigger.

Most small-stakes live regular players exhibit this trait to one degree or another. Ironically, you’ll hear them grumble about the loose, fishy players who check-call the flop with bottom pair and then win a showdown with it. But because of the way these regulars play, giving up so easily when called, calling them with “junk” on the flop is often the correct play.

**The Bottom Line**

When your opponents won’t barrel you on the expensive streets, they lose their stack leverage. This lets you call them lighter on the streets they will barrel. You can bluff-catch them lighter when appropriate, safe in the knowledge that they are not going to subsequently bluff you off your hand with a huge bet. You can also float them both in and out of position, planning to bluff when they check. You need to watch board textures and your opponent’s pot-controlling tendencies to try to tell the difference between checks that give up on the pot and checks designed to induce bluffs. But overall when your opponents won’t barrel for the big bucks, they become much, much easier to play against.
THAT’S IT

Well, that’s it for the excerpt. The full book goes on for another hundred-odd pages. Please support the author and buy it.

Use discount code

ThanksForSupportingAuthor

http://edmillerpoker.com/

Thank you for reading.