

Poker Tips that Pay

*Expert Strategy Guide for
Winning No Limit Texas Hold 'em*



JONATHAN GELLING



Play to Pay Publishing

POKER TIPS THAT PAY

Expert Strategy Guide for Winning No Limit Texas
Hold 'em by Jonathan Gelling



Play to Pay Publishing

Post Office Box 455

Farmingville, NY 11738

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ISBN: 978-0-9840822-9-2

First Edition 2009. First Printing.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wanted to peer into the mind of the world's greatest poker players: to see, step-by-step, the process they use in thinking about a hand? At any moment, a top-notch poker player must consider his chip position, the strength of his cards, the image he's projecting to his opponents, his read on his opponents' play, the chance of improving his hand, the texture of the board, the likelihood of success if he bets, his overall goals, and dozens of other factors.

While all that may seem daunting, there are simple principles underlying this level of thinking. The elements of winning poker play - courage, patience, discipline and judgment - are the same skills you need to excel in any endeavor. This book will help you develop those qualities in your game.

Playing winning poker requires more study than ever before. Big money tournaments have attracted great attention. Online poker has enabled thousands of players to log experience in a fraction of the time it used to take at card rooms and home games. The state of competitive poker today is captured by our first maxim:

"Everything today is at its greatest peak, especially the art of making one's way in the world. There is more required nowadays to make a single wise man than formerly to make seven sages; and more is needed in dealing with a single person than was required with a whole people in former times."

Thus begins Balthasar Gracian's landmark text, *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*. He could easily be referring to our own era: our struggle to make sense of a hyperactive, globalized, media-saturated world on information overload. Except Gracian was a seventeenth century Jesuit priest.

This man of many apparent contradictions – a cultured son of the nobility, devoted clergyman, and Renaissance intellectual – produced a classic book of maxims for all ages. Gracian's broad personal perspective gave him the insight to see that information alone will never lead to true wisdom, no matter how greatly multiplied.

These maxims have been adapted from the original text of *The Art of Worldly Wisdom*, translated by Joseph Jacobs. Illustrated with step-by-step analysis of dozens of actual poker hands, you'll find this sage advice as timely today as when originally penned.

If you follow the lessons in these pages you will certainly be a better poker player than you are right now. These insights should be digested, pondered over, and refined through the crucible of experience. You'll develop your own winning style that works for you.

Poker is not a game of chance, but a battle of wits. Fortune favors the wise.

Jonathan Gelling
Medford, New York

Chapter One

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

It's been fifteen hours now. Fifteen hours of poker these past two days. Fifteen hours surrounded by lights, television cameras, frantic ESPN producers, and hordes of admiring fans. The pressure is intense, but you're too exhausted by now to feel it.

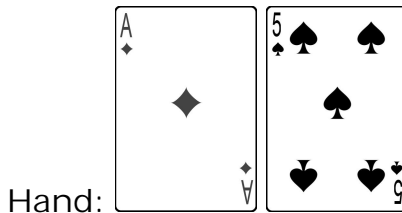
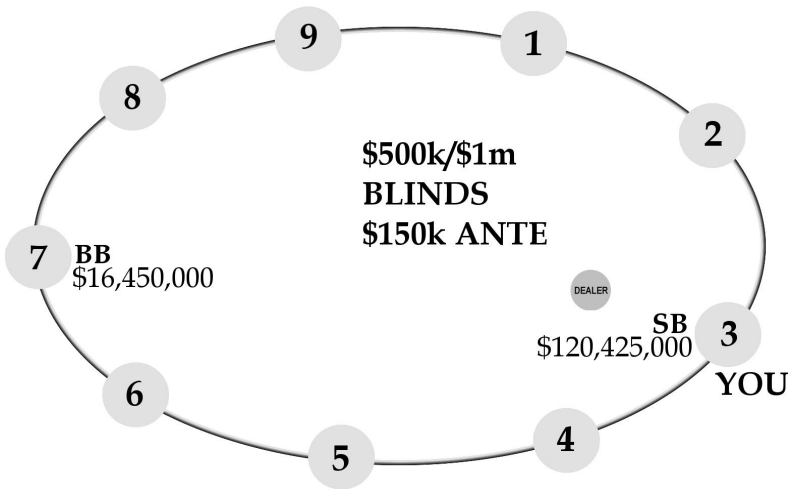
This moment has been four months in the making. That's how long you've waited for this final table to play out, with over \$9 million on the line. Four months of practice, anticipation, studying your opponents, and planning your every move. And it's all come down to this.

There were 6,844 players in this tournament when it started July 3, and nine remained by July 14. The final table was then postponed until November. Good for ratings; agony on the players. But poker is not a game for the impatient.

And now, after all this time, it's down to two. You're heads-up for the World Series of Poker Main Event Championship. There is no more prestigious tournament. Besides the prize money, the winner will be an instant household name and immortalized in the annals of poker history, joining the likes of Johnny Moss, Doyle Brunson, Stu Ungar, Tom McEvoy, Johnny Chan, Phil Hellmuth, Dan Harrington and Chris Ferguson on the exclusive list of Main Event Champions.

This is what every player dreams about. And you're within striking distance of your dream. It's so close you can practically taste it.

The break is over, and soon the cards are flying.



Situation: Heads-up at the final table of the World Series of Poker. You've gained a commanding chip lead over the past two shuffles by hitting some huge hands: a flush and a full house. With the price of poker now \$1.8 million, your opponent is down to an M of 9. He's on the ropes – he'll have to

move quickly to turn this thing around. You're looking for a knock-out blow.

Analysis: We're first to act with our ace-high. Heads-up, any ace is strong. With an ace in your hand, there's only a 12% chance your opponent has an ace as well. There's also a 5.9% chance of him being dealt a pocket pair.

THE POWER OF ACE-HIGH HEADS-UP

If he doesn't have an ace or a pair, we have the best hand. That means we're at least 88% to have the best hand right now. The better your ace, the more likely you're currently ahead. If you hold AK, you're 94% likely to be out in front – only a pocket pair is beating you before the flop.

The standard play is to raise here. We probably have the best hand, so we want to raise the stakes. We're in position as well, which also argues for building a bigger pot.

But we're looking for a knock-out blow. Although taking down the \$1.8 million pot would be nice, we want to position ourselves to earn our opponent's whole stack.

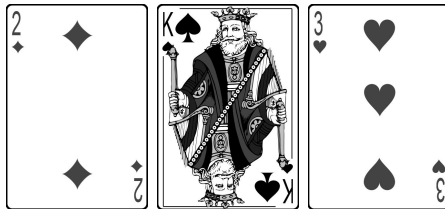
If we limp, he won't expect us to have an ace. We might hit our ace and get action from second or third pair, and earn more money that way.

Or he may assume we're weak and try to raise us off our hand after we limp. We can then

spring our trap by coming over the top of his raise. Either possibility might be more profitable than making a standard raise.

Generally, I'd favor raising here, though. Heads-up, you should often raise on the button, with or without a strong hand. But for the sake of deception and mixing up your play, limping is sometimes appropriate.

Action: You complete the small blind of \$1 million, and your opponent checks. The pot is now \$2.3 million, and it's heads-up to the flop:



Action: He checks.

Analysis: Start your analysis by looking at the good: what hand you have, and what potential it has to improve. Here, we still have the ace-high we started with. We've picked up a wheel draw: a four will give us a five-high straight.

Since as far as we know there are 4 fours remaining in the 47 cards we haven't seen, we have a 4/47 chance of hitting a straight on the turn plus a 4/46 chance of hitting it on the river. We're about 16% to make our gutshot straight draw -- about 8% on each street.

Ace-high and a 16% chance at an inside straight may not sound great. Many players would happily check and take the free card here. Why risk being raised off our draw?

Experienced players generally bet in this spot, however. They know that most flops miss most hands: about two-thirds of the time your opponent will have nothing. Since we likely started with the best hand, we're still in front. A bet here will probably earn us the pot.

We should also pay attention to the relative chip position: we have over seven times as many chips as our opponent. Even if he suspects larceny, there's not much he can do about it without a real hand. His stack is too small to risk a pure bluff.

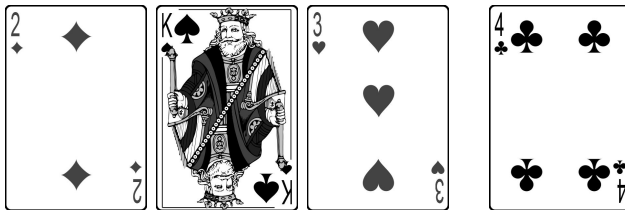
CONSIDER THE TEXTURE OF THE BOARD: RAGGED OR CONNECTED?

This ragged flop is a great one for our semi-bluff. With just one face-card and two rags, how strong can our opponent really be? If he doesn't have a king in his hand, he's playing a pair of deuces, treys, or nothing at all. Will he come over the top of us with those hands?

Note how different this situation would be if the flop was something like K9T as opposed to K23. Then we'd have no hand, no draw, and our opponent could hold a variety of strong hands and

draws. It would make much less sense to bluff in that spot.

Action: You bet \$1.25 million. Your opponent considers for about five seconds before smoothly making the call. The pot is now \$4.8 million, and you're off to the turn:



Action: He ponders for several seconds before checking.

Analysis: Yahtzee! We've made our straight, and with no flushes possible, only a 56 could beat us. If he has that hand, good luck to him. You're never folding a straight heads-up. We have only one objective now: get all the chips in the center and end this thing. How's the best way to go about doing this?

Do we feign weakness here, trying to trap? Absolutely not! Many new players will automatically play their weakest hands most aggressively, and try to trap with their legitimate hands. They think they're being sneaky with their reverse psychological play. But such a mechanical style is easily exploited.

Always play the situation, not just your hand. There's a time and a place for trapping: when you have a monster, your opponent can't have much, and you won't get action unless your opponent catches up or sees an opportunity to bluff. This is not one of those spots.

Consider the board and the action: we limped in, bet the flop on a board of K23, and now a 4 arrives on the turn. We represented a made hand on the flop, something like a pair of kings, threes, or maybe a pocket pair between kings and threes.

In any event, our opponent will read that 4 as a blank: only a gutshot straight draw (A5 or 56) could have connected with that card. No one ever suspects a gutshot, least of all on a ragged board like this.

Since our opponent can't put us on a strong hand, there's no reason we can't get more value by betting the turn here. Our opponent called on the flop, so he probably has *something*. He may not have a king, since he might have raised earlier – unless he was laying an ill-fated trap for us.

If he called on the flop with a pair of deuces or threes, he may also call a bet here. Maybe he now has two pair (32, 42, 43). Either way he'll probably call, since the 4 seems unlikely to have helped our hand. You should assume your opponent will call on the turn if he called on the flop and a blank comes.

IF YOUR OPPONENT IS DRAWING, GET THE MONEY IN BEFORE THE RIVER

Maybe he has a 5, or an ace, and now has a straight draw himself. If your opponent has some kind of draw, he might call a bet on the flop and turn, but won't if he misses on the river. Get the money in now while the getting is good. There's no worse mistake in poker than handing out free cards.

Action: You bet \$2 million into the \$4.8 million pot, hoping your opponent has enough of a hand to stick around. He check-raises to \$6 million. The pot is now \$12,800,000, and it costs you \$4 million to call. Your opponent has \$8,050,000 remaining in his stack. He has invested more than half his stack, \$8.4 million, in this hand.

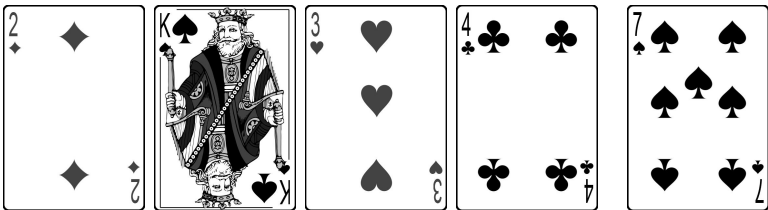
Analysis: Should we just call here, or set him all-in? Although our opponent appears to have committed himself to the hand, flat calling is probably best here. Unless one of the three remaining fives comes on the river, our hand is relatively invulnerable.

It's possible he's making this big check-raise with a pair and a straight-draw, in which case we'd want to set him all-in here before he misses the draw on the river. But it's more likely he has top pair, two pair, or maybe a set. And he could be making a move -- he's shown a capacity for making huge bluffs at the final table thus far. In

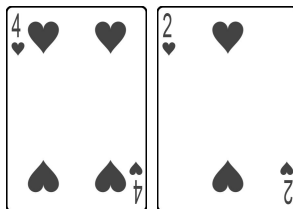
any event, it's probably best not to scare him away with a re-raise right here.

He'll have to act first on the river, which is a perfect opportunity for him to fire off his remaining chips. For that reason, we should probably lean towards calling here. Hopefully he'll feel committed to the hand after putting half his stack in, and push all-in regardless of the river.

Action: You call the extra \$4 million. The pot is now \$16.8 million, and your opponent has just over \$8 million left in his stack. Getting over 3:1 to call all-in, it'd be a heroic fold on the river if he checks to us (we'll of course set him all-in). The river brings a blank:



Action: Your opponent goes all-in for his remaining stack, and you quickly call. He turns over his two-pair:



The fatigue is evident as it takes him several seconds to read the board and realize he's beaten. The energy is running a little low after so many hours of grueling play. But it's more than that: he never put you on an ace. Although a 65 was an obvious danger on the turn, he never considered a wheel draw. The turn was a total disaster for him.

As stunned as your opponent is, you're even more speechless. It takes several seconds to process. You're the new World Series of Poker Champion for 2008 - the best in the world. You're a permanent part of poker history.

How did you get here? Was it because you were "lucky" to make a straight when your opponent made two pair? Sure that was fortunate; your opponent didn't make any real mistakes. There's almost no way to get away from two-pair in a heads-up situation, particularly on a non-threatening board like that.

But you also outwitted, outmaneuvered, and outlasted over 6,800 players on your way to the top. And you built a huge chip lead heading into this hand. If you hadn't demonstrated serious poker skills in the hours before this "lucky" hand played out, you wouldn't have had a chance to get "lucky" at all. In the long run, it's not the cards, but the value you extract from your hands.

It's your poker experience, the wisdom you've developed over countless thousands of hands that brought you here. If you play well, you earn the chance to get "lucky."