

B U I L D I N G
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BANKROLL
FULL RING EDITION

Proven Strategies for Moving Up in Stakes
Playing No Limit Hold'em Online

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Foreword by Taylor Caby

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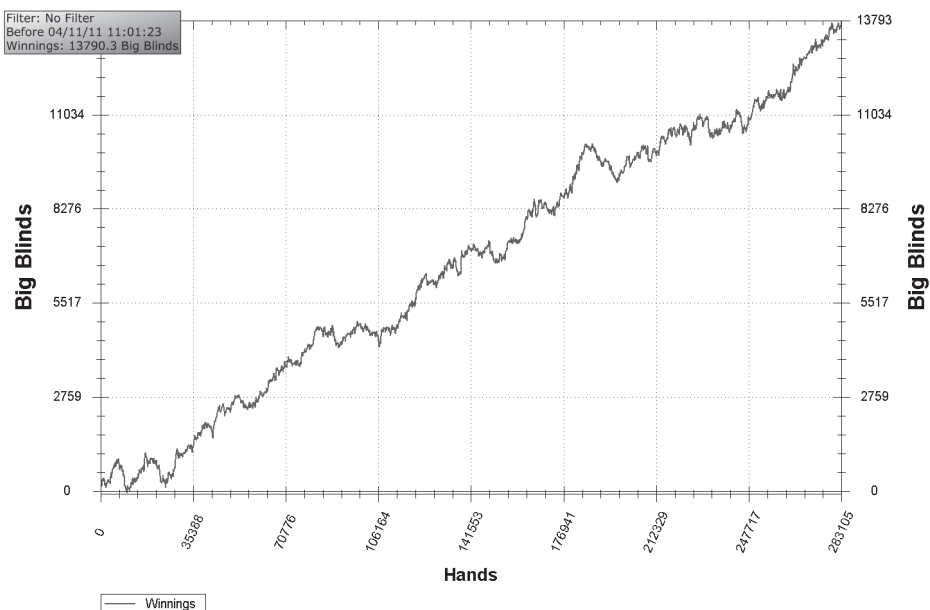
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INTRODUCTION

On January 1st of 2011, I had \$200 in my Full Tilt Poker account and a goal to turn it into \$10,000. Exactly 100 days later (of which 83 included actual playing), I met my goal. Ironically, my bankroll had reached five-figures the day before Black Friday. Here are my results in big blinds from the 2011 Challenge.



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I wrote this book to serve as a foundation for how this can be replicated, and in some cases, done even faster and better.

Anyone can become a winning poker player. Most don't. As I listen to students and read the forums, it becomes abundantly clear that most people are focused on the wrong things.

I see hands posted on the forums which show players making river calls with queen-high, or floating with air for two streets, in order to bluff-shove all-in on the river to get a fold. The comments others make when seeing such hands are "sick," "sexy," and "OMG!"

This mentality is counter-productive if your goals include:

1. Building a bankroll at your current stakes.
2. Moving up in stakes and repeating goal #1.

I want to help you execute the above process by outlining seven fundamentals which are critical to having long-term success in poker. My hope is that this book serves as a springboard to help you make more money at your current limit before moving up to the next one and beyond.

It is important to note that although my play in the 2011 Challenge was strictly at the full ring Rush tables, the lessons in this book carry over to non-Rush games as well as to six-max games.

I have identified seven key areas essential to being a successful long-term winner in poker regardless of stake, site, or format. In this book, I will outline those seven areas while providing many examples from my play at 10NL and at 25NL.

The Seven Fundamentals

There is absolutely no reason why any truly motivated person can't be a long-term winner playing poker. That said, there are plenty of reasons why most people are destined to be long-term losers. Let's look at what it takes to have long-term success in this game.

1. **Accept Variance.** Just because you are a good player doesn't mean you will win over the course of a session, a day, a week, or even a month. Luck plays a significant role in poker. It is important to understand that just because you are winning, that doesn't mean that you are playing well. Conversely, losing doesn't mean you are playing poorly.

2. **Manage Your Bankroll.** This is your main line of defense against going broke. If you are losing, bankroll management forces you to eventually drop down in stakes. It also serves as a motivator for moving up. If you are winning, start taking shots at the next level.
3. **Develop Reads.** It is important to understand both your HUD and how stats converge. Identify different opponent types and figure out the proper strategy adjustments to make against them at the tables.
4. **Play Solid.** Know why certain plays will win you money in the long run and why others will not. None of the ideas discussed in this section should come as a major surprise. Yet it is amazing how often I observe seemingly solid players making huge fundamental errors at the tables.
5. **Stay on Your A-Game.** There is a big difference between knowing the right play and actually making the right play. To be a winning player, you need to control tilt and to play your A-game over long periods of time. For many of you, this will be a work-in-progress.
6. **Put in the Hours.** Mastery is achieved through experience. There is no substitute for actual work at and away from the tables.
7. **Remain a Student.** Resist falling into complacency. It happens so easily with poker. Evaluate your game continually, identify which areas give you trouble, and work hard to improve them. Study players that you respect and use their success as motivation.

If you master these seven areas, you will be a winning poker player in the long-term. I realize that is much easier said than done. Still, my goal is to make this process as easy as possible for you.

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PLAYING TURNS AND RIVERS

I have been thinking about the important elements to postflop play and have tried to generalize them. There are a lot of factors to consider when it comes to playing later streets, all of which stem from the preflop action.

In my opinion, this is the essence of good postflop play:

1. Correctly partitioning and narrowing your opponent's range based on previous actions.
2. Making the most profitable play based on your analysis of their range.

Keep these two factors in mind as you study the rest of the chapter.

A Hypothetical Preflop Range

For the sake of simplicity, assume that a particular player (let's call him Homer) only plays hands preflop from the following range:

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Depending on the preflop action, Homer will make decisions which partition this range into smaller ranges.

Example One: Homer Calls a Raise from Middle Position

In this example, Homer is on the button and faces a middle position raise from a TAG named Bart. Homer makes his first partition:

Split 1: This is how Homer would play the hypothetical preflop range assigned to him above:

- ▶ Raise: AA, KK, AK, 97s, K8s, K3s, K2s
- ▶ Call: 22, 33, 77, 88, 99, 78s, 89s, A2s, A3s
- ▶ Fold: Everything else

Homer ends up calling which means that his range going forward is:

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Continuing with the hand, another TAG named Marge calls from the big blind and all three players go to the flop. The flop comes Q♦ 7♠ 4♦. Marge checks and Bart, the original raiser, c-bets around half-pot. The action is back on Homer.

Split 2: Now Homer breaks up his range into:

- ▶ Raise: 77, A♦ 2♦, A♦ 3♦, 7♦ 8♦
- ▶ Call: 99, 88, 9♦ 8♦
- ▶ Fold: Everything else

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Homer calls Bart's c-bet and Marge ends up folding. By calling, Homer's range narrows to this:

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Notice that 98s only includes diamonds. This is because Homer would have folded all other combinations of 98s on the flop.

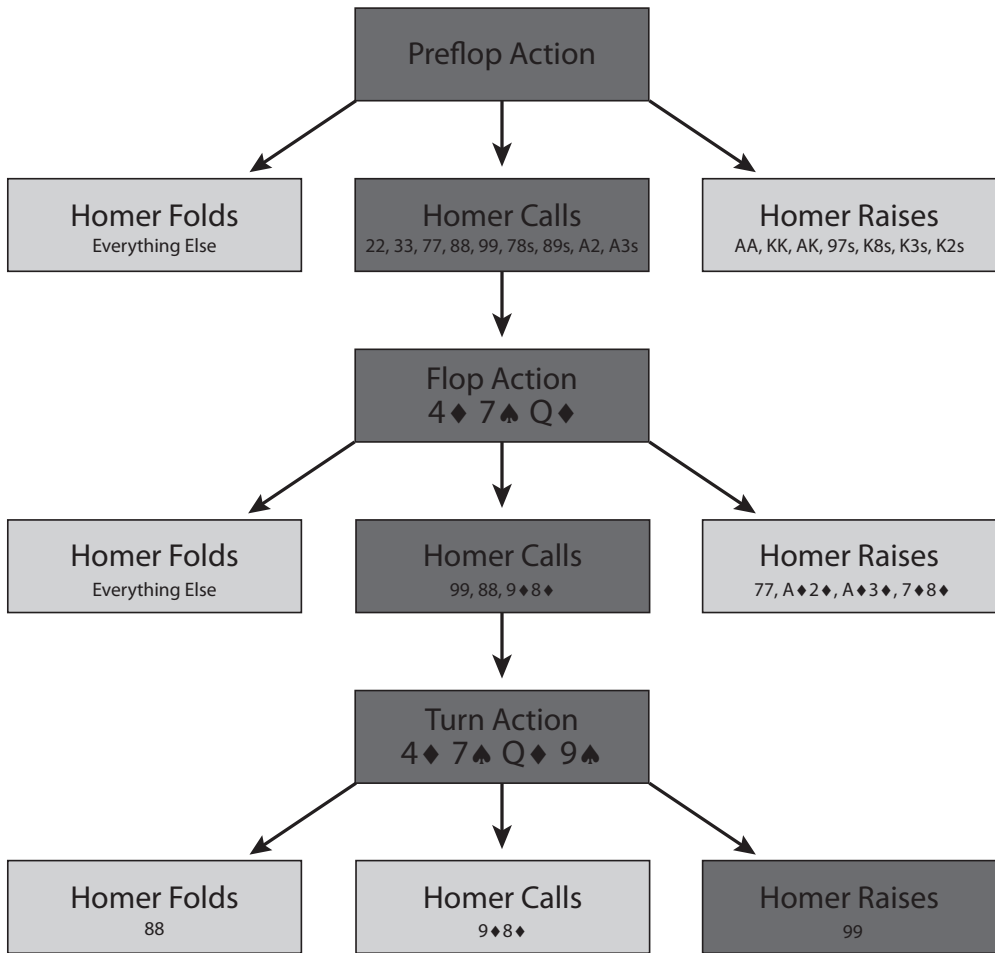
The two players see the 9♠ on the turn. The board now reads Q♦ 7♠ 4♦ 9♠. Bart bets again, this time around 60% of the pot.

Split 3: This is how Homer would play his remaining range:

- ▶ Raise: 99
- ▶ Call: 9♦ 8♦
- ▶ Fold: 88

Homer raises. What should Bart do? If Bart has a good read on Homer and was able to correctly narrow his range based on preflop, flop, and turn actions, he will fold everything other than a set of queens.

The entire process can be graphically represented by the following flowchart:



If the flop had a different texture or had it played out another way, Homer would react by dividing his range accordingly. The key point to take away is that the stronger Bart's read is on Homer, the better Bart will be able to read Homer's range as it develops and make correct decisions.

So why isn't poker this straightforward in real life?

Applying this Concept to Real Tables

Anytime you are reading hands postflop, you are essentially performing a quick and dirty version of the above process. This is much harder to do at the poker table because:

- ▶ Preflop ranges are wider. Unlike Homer, real players will have the full 1,326 possible starting hand combinations.
- ▶ Your reads are worse. Even if you have thousands of hands on another player, the best you can do is approximate how they are likely to act (i.e. partition up their ranges).
- ▶ You have a limited amount of time to make decisions. You are bound to make errors.
- ▶ There is basic math involved in decision making.
- ▶ Your opponents are human and play inconsistently. For example, there are times when an opponent will raise their hand in one spot but call a very similar hand in another.

Despite all of these reasons, you should still strive to execute a similar process. The next example looks at a hand that demonstrates this thought process at the poker table.

Example Two: Heads Up Versus a Regular

You raise J♥ J♣ from the hijack and get called by a tight regular from the small blind. The Big Blind folds and you go to the flop heads up. Before the flop comes down, you should make a quick mental map of the most likely hands that the villain would play given the previous action.

The chart below includes two shades of grey. The darker shades represent the hands which you believe are the most probable for your opponent to have in this situation. The lighter shades includes hands which he could have, but that you discount for various reasons.

For example, QQ and AK are both shaded lighter because you think that your opponent could have three-bet them instead. Hands 22–44, 78s–9Ts, and AJs are all shaded lighter because you believe that the villain could have also folded them preflop from the small blind to your hijack raise.

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

The flop comes down T♣ 8♥ 3♥. As expected, villain checks. You notice that over the twenty times he has faced a c-bet, he has folded 50% of the time, raised 10% of the time, and called 40% of the time. Those numbers seem standard. Should you bet your jacks here?

Split 1: Here is a rough sketch of what you expect your opponent to do if you bet:

- ▶ Fold: 22, 44-77, AQo (most), AK, AJs, KQs, (non-hearts)
- ▶ Call: QQ, JJ, 99, 87s, 98s, T9s, JTs (all of them non-hearts), K♥ Q♥
- ▶ Raise: 33, 88, TT, QJs, A♥ K♥, A♥ Q♥, T♥ 9♥, random bluff (A♥ Qx)

You include some combinations of AQo in raise, like those with the A♥ acting as the nut flush draw blocker. Also, since the flop is draw-heavy, QJs could be in this player's raising range. He could try to use his perceived image to capitalize on the extra fold equity that comes with this flop texture.

So should you bet to protect your hand? To answer that, open up your favorite equity calculation software (like PokerStove or ProPokerTools) and figure out how much equity the villain's folding range has versus your jacks. I realize that you won't have time to do this while actually playing, but it is important to do this type of math away from the tables as part of your studying.

If your calculations are correct, villain will have around 15% equity in this spot. The important point to consider however is that he is unlikely to put any more money into the pot unless he improves. If he does improve however, he will have you crushed. This is vastly different compared to a spot where you have

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A♠ A♥ on an 8♣ 2♦ 2♠ board. If your opponent holds K♠ Q♦, he can still improve his hand but you stay significantly ahead with your aces.

This is not the case here. Betting to deny your opponent that equity is a good idea. Betting will also get called by plenty of worse hands. You won't face a check/raise often enough to warrant checking behind out of fear. So you bet 70% of the pot and the villain calls.

Here is the newly narrowed hand map for your perception of his range going to the turn.

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Scare Cards and Blank Cards

Scare cards are cards that come on later streets which are likely to improve a player's range. There are scare cards for both the preflop raiser and the preflop caller(s). Blank cards are cards which are unlikely to improve either player given the action.

As you improve at assessing opponent ranges, you will be able to more accurately identify which cards should be scare cards for whom. Based on your reads, here are the scare cards and the blank cards for the previous hand above (example two):

- ▶ **Scare card for you:** An eight improves 87s and 98s. A nine improves T9, 98, and 99. Any heart, king, or queen improves K♥ Q♥.

- ▶ **Scare cards for the villain:** Anything above a ten. Possibly hearts unless he has K♥ Q♥.
- ▶ **Blank cards:** Everything else.

Even though you might think that a heart is a scare card for your hand, a heart shouldn't really scare you that much. This is based on the preflop range you put your opponent on as well as the fact that he check/called the flop. You expect him to play his draws out of position faster.

The turn is the 4♦ and is a major blank. The board now reads 10♣ 8♥ 3♥ 4♦. Should you bet again?

Split 2: If you bet, you predict that the villain will do the following:

- ▶ Fold: 87s and 98s that failed to improve on the turn.
- ▶ Call: QQ, JJ, and T9s still have top pair or better. K♥ Q♥ with the flush draw and two overcards will call again as well. Nines could go either way. The villain could call or fold them.
- ▶ Raise: Nothing. A raise here would be very unexpected since you expected most sets to check-raise the flop.

Overall, a bet here should be +EV. This player could get stubborn with second pair even though you don't expect him to. Checking might also pique your opponent's curiosity if a blank hits on the river.

You decide to bet and the villain calls. Here is his final narrowed range:

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

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Scare cards heading to the river:

- ▶ **Scare card for you:** Nines, tens, queens, and kings are bad for you.
- ▶ **Scare cards for villain:** Like on the turn, a heart or anything above a ten is a scare card unless he has exactly $K♥ Q♥$.
- ▶ **Blank cards:** All other cards.

The river is the $9♠$. The board now reads $10♣ 8♥ 3♥ 4♦ 9♠$. Villain leads for around 60% pot. Should you call?

Given the ranges you put your opponent on for each street, the hands that make the most sense for him to lead are T9s and 99. These hands now have either two pair or a set and are looking to get value. If he played queens passively for two streets, it seems unlikely for him to now lead the river for 60% pot. Check-folding is the mostly likely move for his KQs. So the best play now is to just fold.

Additional Thoughts on Playing the Turn As the Preflop Raiser

Although you face a preflop decision one hundred percent of the time at the poker table, an overwhelming majority of those decisions result in a fold. Taking a closer look at my TAG style reveals that I make a flop decision 10% of the time, a turn decision 5% of the time, and a river decision a mere 3% of the time. Although turn and river decisions may not be made as often, they tend to be more expensive due to the nature of escalating bet sizes on later streets.

In general, if you bet the flop and get called, your opponents have some sort of hand. This will usually be a:

- ▶ **Strong made hand.** These hands have your range crushed and are being slowplayed on the flop.
- ▶ **Weak made hand.** This includes weak top pair hands or worse. These hands are often just trying to get to showdown cheaply and to become bluff-catchers when faced with multiple streets of aggression from a good player.
- ▶ **Draw.** These hands offer no showdown value at the moment but have the potential to improve.

The art of playing the turn lies in evaluating how likely it is that your opponent has a hand in one of those categories and in knowing your best play in that

situation. In general, opponents will have weak hands or draws if they just call your bet on the flop. Therefore, it is usually best to continue your aggression if you think that you had the best hand on the flop. Likewise, you are better off giving up if you didn't hit and don't have much hope of improving.

If you think that your opponent had a weak made hand on the flop and the turn improves your equity or provides a scare card, you should double-barrel. If you think your opponent had a draw on the flop and the turn doesn't improve your hand however, double-barrelling without a good read is often just spew since people don't like folding draws before the river.

Baluga Theorem and the Turn Raise

Most of the time, turn and river raises in single raised pots tend to represent legitimate strength. In fact, Andrew "BalugaWhale" Seidman wrote a theory post on TwoPlusTwo in 2006 dedicated to facing a turn raise. In essence he said that one-pair hands are often beaten facing a turn raise. The concept caught on and the situation became known as the Baluga Theorem.

Example of the Baluga Theorem

You raise A♦ K♠ from UTG and get called by a TAG on the button and a LAG in the small blind. The flop comes K♠ 8♥ 5♦. The LAG checks and you c-bet a standard amount. The TAG on the button folds and the LAG calls. The turn is the J♣. The LAG checks, you bet again, and this time you get raised. According to the Baluga Theorem, your AK is currently behind your opponent's hand.

Here are a few points to consider about the Baluga Theorem:

- ▶ It is only applicable in single raised pots. In three-bet pots, turn raises could simply mean that your opponent feels sufficiently pot-committed.
- ▶ Turn check/raises are stronger than just turn raises. Some players will raise turns as a means of buying themselves a showdown or as a semi-bluff.
- ▶ You get raised or check-raised less often than you think.

Since many players are afraid of getting check-raised on the turn, they tend to play turns passively for the sake of pot control. In general you are better off betting and setting your own price for showdown instead of ceding control to your opponent.

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If you are in doubt, bet/folding the turn or betting the turn and check/folding the river is a better play than check/calling the turn and having to check/guess the river.

Checking for Pot Control

There are situations when checking the turn for pot control is the best play. Most of the time you should do it when you are in position and unsure of your equity.

Example One: Way Ahead/Way Behind

You raise $Q\spadesuit Q\heartsuit$ from UTG and get called by a loose-passive player in the big blind. The flop comes $2\heartsuit 7\clubsuit A\clubsuit$. Villain checks, you bet, and he calls. The turn is the $9\heartsuit$. Villain checks again.

This is a good spot to check back for pot control. If your opponent has an ace, you only have two outs to improve and he is unlikely to fold. If the villain has a pair sevens or 88–JJ, he has very few outs to improve and is happy to go to showdown. This is known as a *way ahead* or *way behind* situation.

Example Two: Realizing Backdoor Equity with Limited Fold Equity

You raise $5\spadesuit 6\heartsuit$ from the cutoff and get called by a TAG in the big blind. The flop comes $J\heartsuit 9\heartsuit 5\heartsuit$. The TAG checks, you c-bet, and the TAG calls. The turn is the $8\heartsuit$ and the big blind checks again. After thinking about your opponent's range, you decide that you have limited fold equity on the turn and don't want to get blown off your equity by a check-raise. This is a good spot to check back.

Example Three: Realizing a Redraw

You raise $5\spadesuit 5\heartsuit$ from the hijack and get called by a loose-passive player on the button. The flop comes $2\heartsuit 3\clubsuit 5\clubsuit$. You bet and get called. The turn is the $4\clubsuit$. While there are a lot of hands villain could have in this spot that are now ahead of you, you still have 25% equity if he has a straight or a non-nut flush. Checking with the intention to check/call is the best play in this situation. If you fill up on the river, you should lead with your full house.

Betting for Pot Control

The advantage of betting the turn is that you control the price if your opponent wishes to continue. Bets designed to force an inexpensive showdown are called *blocker bets*.

Example One: Blocker Bet

You raise J♠ J♥ from UTG and get called by a loose-passive player on the button. The flop comes Q♦ 7♥ 5♥. You c-bet and get called. The turn is the 2♥, a relative blank. This would be a good spot to blocker bet. Although you shouldn't expect a queen to fold, there are plenty of worse hands that could decide to continue.

Betting accomplishes a few things:

- ▶ You can comfortably bet/fold the turn if the villain puts in a big raise.
- ▶ If you are called and the river is a blank, you can bet again for thin value or check to induce a missed draw to bluff.
- ▶ You get value from weaker hands and draws that might check back the turn.

Example Two: Reverse Blocker Bet

A *reverse blocker bet* is a bet on the turn, in position, designed to get you to the river so you can check back. You raise 10♠ 9♠ from the cutoff and get called by a loose-passive player in the big blind. The flop comes 10♦ 8♦ 5♠ and villain check/calls your flop c-bet. The turn is the K♥ and he checks a second time.

There are plenty of weaker hands that will continue here if you bet. That said, if you bet and get called, most of your opponent's hands will fall into one of these categories:

- ▶ **Draws.** If a draw misses on the river and your opponent was on a draw, you are not going to get any more value by betting.
- ▶ **Better hands.** You can value own yourself by betting against better hands.
- ▶ **Weaker made hands.** There just won't be many weak made hands that can take three streets of aggression from you unless the player is a complete calling station.

Therefore, your best play is to bet the turn and then check back just about any river that doesn't improve your hand.

Additional Thoughts on Playing the River As the Preflop Raiser

By the time you reach the river, you should have a pretty good idea of where you stand in the hand.

- ▶ If you think you have the best hand, design a bet size that will extract value either by being called by a worse hand or by inducing a bluff raise. Checking to call when all draws missed to induce a bluff works well against weaker players.
- ▶ If you don't think you have the best hand, but you think your opponent is very weak (especially if they likely missed a draw), you can choose to bluff. Otherwise just give up. By default, a triple-barrel bluff is spew.
- ▶ If you are clueless as to whether or not you have the best hand and you consistently find yourself guessing, you need to work on hand reading on earlier streets.

Playing the river is definitely a skill that is acquired from lots and lots of practice. There are so many river situations that I simply cannot cover all of them. Compared to the turn however, the river should provide you with a better sense of what to do since all of the cards have been revealed.

Bluff-Catching

Sometimes, even if you have a good hand, there is more value in bluff-catching. For example, you raise preflop from UTG+1 with $K\heartsuit K\spadesuit$ and get called by a weak player in the cutoff. The flop comes $9\heartsuit 8\heartsuit 6\clubsuit$. You bet and get called. The turn is the $3\clubsuit$. You bet a second time and get called again. The river is the $2\diamondsuit$. This is a great spot to check because your opponent will often have some sort of busted draw ($7x, Tx, \text{spades}$) that he might try to bluff now that he missed.

Given the same hand and action with a board of $Q\heartsuit J\heartsuit 6\clubsuit 3\clubsuit 5\diamondsuit$, you should put in a medium-sized value bet since you are much more likely to get called by a jack or a queen.