
Introduction

A few years ago, I was sitting at a \$30-\$60 table when someone came down from the mezzanine where they keep the higher-limit games. He was in playing the \$80-\$160 game. He excitedly told his friend playing in my game that the friend had to get on the \$80-\$160 list, because there was player in it who was playing terribly. The friend asked who it was, and the player pointed to a man who has had more success at the \$80-\$160 game over the last few years than anyone else in the Bellagio. So they both went to play against him, thinking he did not know how to play.

The fact is that the most successful middle-limit (and higher) players play in a style that is unfamiliar to the average poker player. These experts play and frequently raise with hands that the average player would not consider reasonable, make calls when others might raise, yet still go considerable stretches without playing at all. This, of course, confuses the average player, and makes him believe that the successful player is making all sorts of errors.



NOTE: This book explores and demystifies many of the expert plays. It explains in detail why and how an expert player makes the plays he does, and tells you how to find situations to make those highly profitable plays yourself.

As an example, let's look at pre-flop decisions. The average poker player starts by assessing his hand. He decides if it is worth a raise, call, or fold. If he finds a raising hand, he typically raises if first in or if no one else has raised, and calls if someone else has raised unless he has A-A, K-K, Q-Q, or A-K. With these he reraises. If he has a calling hand, he calls if first in and generally calls if someone has raised in front of him. Only if it is three bets to him does he pause to decide whether he wishes to play. With a folding hand, he folds. Note that this decision is made virtually as soon as he looks at his cards. The main exception comes when he finds himself on the button, and no one has entered the pot. He may now decide to steal, and raise with many hands, sometimes even all of them.

How does an expert player look at the same situation? First, he assesses his position relative to the button. He looks at the blinds, to see how well or poorly they play, and how loose or tight they are. He reviews the other players to see how each is playing, and decides whom he would prefer to play against. He recalls if any have any special characteristics, such as a player who always raises after a bad beat no matter what his cards. He determines what he would like to accomplish when the betting reaches him. He looks to his left to see how the players who are to act after him look at their cards and whether he can tell what actions they are likely to take. He looks right to see what the action is to him.

Then he looks at his cards and decides how the ones he happens to hold fit with his overall concept of the game and how he wishes to play the hand. He mostly still folds, of course, but also calls, raises, or three-bets depending on the action and how the specific players play.

We all start learning hold'em seriously by looking at someone's pre-flop hand chart. The idea that you look at your hand and decide what to do is very ingrained, as it should be. As you can see from the above discussion, the top pro not only considers far more than his cards in making his decisions, he often determines that those factors are more important than the hand he holds.

Of course, talking about cards is far easier than talking about these other factors. But this book emphasizes the non-card related factors that go into making an advanced strategic poker decision. Specifically, we will discuss:

- ♠ Position
- ♠ People
- ♠ Aggression
- ♠ Dead Money
- ♠ Image

This book will improve your limit poker game. If you are a tight player, it will show you how and when to play looser. If you are a loose player, it will show you how and when to play tighter. Overall, this book will make you more money than you make now, or – if you are not yet a winner – it will show you how to stop losing.

If you are beginner, please do not read this book first. Read some basic books and play for a while. I am trying to improve your game, not to give you one.

I assume that you have some idea what ABC poker is like, and are familiar with the general terms and playing styles of the game. I won't waste your time with the basics.

As for me, I am a poker professional, columnist, speaker, coach, and teacher. I have worked with hundreds of students and have heard about thousands of hands played by others. In private lessons, I give advice tailored to the specific needs of each student. For this book, I have taken the most common issues they faced and presented much of the advice I have shared with them.

This book presents concepts and advice for practical implementation. Some of it has appeared in some form in *Card Player* magazine, the cardplayer.com website, and the pokerpages.com web site, but much of the material is new. Some of the hands and discussions also appeared on my website, www.barrytanenbaum.com, and on the forum I host there.

The book is divided into two main parts:

- ♠ Concepts
- ♠ Stages

Part 1, Concepts, deals with your overall approach. It highlights the value of unpredictability, emphasizing that your primary goals are:

Advanced Limit Hold'em Strategy

1. To be unpredictable.
2. To make your opponents predictable.

The more predictable you can make your opponents, the easier it becomes for you to read hands, make sound decisions, and execute correct situational plays. This book tells you how to accomplish these goals.

Part I also describes the methods top players use to win money in tougher games, working towards winning one big bet per hour or more in middle- and higher-limit games. You may be able to make money in easy games just playing ABC poker, but if you want to make real profits in tougher games, you need to learn to play situations in addition to your cards. You will also learn the importance of balance, which is the key to keeping your opponents guessing about how you play while forcing them into greater predictability.

Part 1, Stages, defines advanced, winning strategies for every street.

Pre-flop

The Pre-flop chapters teach you to assess hand values according to position and the specific situation and determine which opponents to attack and which to avoid. They also tell you when, how often, and from whom you should attempt blind steals, as well as what and how to play when you are in the blinds.

The Flop

The Flop chapters tell you how to plan the play of the hand, and how to execute that plan. They also define the factors that go into your decision of when to raise and reraise. They describe what to do when you are first to act after the flop and discuss the common errors players make and how to avoid them.

The Turn

The Turn chapters tell you what to consider after seeing

the turn card, how that card may affect your plan, and what to do if it does. They review the way you got to the turn, and how to proceed in each case. They provide the factors you need to consider in deciding whether to raise, and how to view your opponents' raises. They define the key principle of "way ahead or way behind", to help you to recognize when it happens, and decide how to play. Finally, this section provides detailed case-by-case analysis of one of the toughest situations in hold'em: playing from out of position on the turn.

The River

The River chapters say why the river is different from every other street, and how you must adapt to those unique conditions. They give you guidelines for when to bet, check, and raise, depending on your position, your opponents, your image, and your hand. Aggression on the river is a key to making extra bets, and here you will learn when to make value bets, and how to respond to them. You will learn when to be aggressive, when to be passive, and the ways to time your raises for the greatest effect.

Overall, your game will become more aggressive, more positional, more geared to your opponent's weaknesses, and, most important, much more profitable.