

Hand 23

Applying Pressure

♣ - ♥ - ♦ - ♠ - ♣ - ♥ - ♦ - ♠

INTRODUCTION

This is an eight-player \$20-\$40 game. You are in the big blind with 10♥-8♥. Yet again you are pleased to be sitting at the same table as TheRabbit, a very poor player who we met in Hands 2 and 22. TheRabbit is in middle position. The button is Cyprus. You know Cyprus well – he is a competent, aggressive player but no world-beater. He is typical of many reasonable players in that he bets his hard pre-flop and on the flop but tends to play more conservatively on the turn and river.

THE PLAY

Pre-flop

The first two players fold and next to speak is TheRabbit, who limps. The next two players fold and now Cyprus raises from the button. The small blind folds. There is \$90 in the pot and it is \$20 to you.

Question 1. Do you (a) fold (b) call (c) raise?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	(c) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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You call, as does TheRabbit.

Flop

Hypothetical Flop

The flop is 10♦-8♣-6♦. You hold 10♥-8♥. There is \$130 in the pot and it is \$20 to bet.

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Question 2. Do you (a) check, planning to call (b) check, planning a check-raise (c) bet?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	(c) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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Actual Flop

The flop is 9♦-6♥-2♣. You hold 10♥-8♥. There is \$130 in the pot and it is \$20 to bet.

Question 3. Do you (a) check, planning to call (b) check, planning a check raise (c) bet?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	(c) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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You check, TheRabbit checks and Cyprus bets. There is \$150 in the pot and it is \$20 to you.

Question 4. Do you (a) fold (b) call (c) raise?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	(c) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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You raise and TheRabbit folds. Cyprus calls.

Turn

Hypothetical Turn 1

The turn is 9♦-6♥-2♣-5♠. You hold 10♥-8♥. There is \$210 in the pot and it is \$40 to bet.

Question 5. Do you (a) check (b) bet?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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Hypothetical Turn 2

The turn is 9♦-6♥-2♣-A♠. You hold 10♥-8♥. There is \$210 in the pot and it is \$40 to bet.

Question 6. Do you (a) check (b) bet?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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You bet.

How Good is your Limit Hold'em?

Hypothetical Turn 2 continued

Cyprus now raises. You know Cyprus well enough to be 'certain' that he has at least an ace. You also know that you will not be able to push him out of the pot by re-raising. Therefore your only consideration is whether you have a worthwhile call to improve to a winning hand. With this in mind: there is \$330 in the pot and it is \$40 to you.

Firstly, considering only pot odds:

Question 7a. Do you (a) have a clear fold (b) have a clear call (c) it is a very close decision?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	(c) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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Secondly, if you also take into consideration other factors such as implied odds, table image etc:

Question 7b. Do you now (a) have a clear fold (b) have a clear call (c) it is a very close decision?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	(c) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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Actual Turn

The turn is 9♦-6♥-2♣-A♥. You hold 10♥-8♥. There is \$210 in the pot and it is \$40 to bet.

Question 8. Do you (a) check (b) bet?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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You bet and Cyprus raises. There is \$330 in the pot and it is \$40 to you.

Question 9. Do you (a) fold (b) call (c) raise?

(a) <input type="checkbox"/>	(b) <input type="checkbox"/>	(c) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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You call.

River

The river is 9♦-6♥-2♣-A♥-9♥. You hold 10♥-8♥. There is \$370 in the pot and it is \$40 to bet.

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Question 10. Do you (a) check (b) bet?

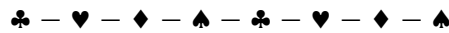
(a) <input type="checkbox"/> (b) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
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You bet. Cyprus now raises. There is \$490 in the pot and it is \$40 to you.

Question 11. Do you (a) fold (b) call (c) raise?

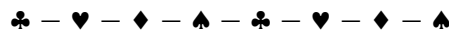
(a) <input type="checkbox"/> (b) <input type="checkbox"/> (c) <input type="checkbox"/>	Points:
Total:	

You call. Cyprus shows down 6♣-6♦ for a full house.



SCORECHART

- 100** Outstanding. You played excellent hold'em and lost a bundle. This happens all too often.
- 90-99** Excellent. You have a good feel for when to apply pressure.
- 80-89** Good. You must have broadly taken the initiative in the right places.
- 70-79** Average.
- 60-69** Never mind. Maybe you check-folded early and saved yourself some grief.
- below 60** Poor.



ANSWERS AND ANALYSIS

Holding: 10♥-8♥.

Question 1. (a) 2 (b) 5 (c) 0

This hand is certainly playable. Had the action so far been different with a raise coming from an early player, and then a call from a late player then it would not be so clear. There would be a greater danger of facing an overpair when you would need to hit the flop hard to have any chance in the pot. In those circumstances a fold is probably best. However, although you can presume that Cyprus has a reasonable holding, there is no need to put him on a powerhouse. He has prime position and is raising a weak player; he could make such a play with a wide variety of hands.

How Good is your Limit Hold'em?

Question 2. (a) 5 (b) 12 (c) 20

Obviously this is a great flop for you as you have hit top two pair. However, your hand is more vulnerable than you may think, especially with TheRabbit having limped into the pot. There are a number of unpleasant cards that can come on the turn: any diamond completes a flush draw, a 9 or 7 complete a potential gutshot and even a 6 will seriously diminish your holding, since you are then losing to a 6 or an overpair and are suddenly vulnerable to overcards. This is no time to be slowplaying your holding, so check-calling – as a slowplay – is horrible.

Nevertheless, check-calling here is a mistake that many players make and so it is worth discussing why this is such a bad play. What they plan to do is check-call the flop and then go for a check-raise on the turn when the bet size doubles. However, if you can visualise how the hand is likely to develop, you can see that there are many problems with this approach:

1) If Cyprus has just overcards, say A-J, and has no drawing possibilities, then the flop will look rather scary for him and he may just check and take the free card. We know that he is aggressive but he is not stupid. He will be well aware that such a flop could easily have connected with the (limping) opposition, and he could decide that he would rather take a free card – trying to hit an overcard – than bet and risk a nasty check-raise. We have already noted how many bad cards can come on the turn so this is a no time to give a free card.

2) However, let's assume Cyprus does bet and you now just call. It is likely that TheRabbit will call too. Now what will you do on the turn? If a bad card comes (e.g. a diamond, a 9 or a 7) will you bet? You probably will because now you cannot play for a check-raise on the turn, since someone may have completed their draw and you could be playing only four outs. So you will probably bet and if you get raised it will be ugly.

However, even if a good card (e.g. a random low card) comes, it is still not clear how you should play the hand. Checking, trying for a check-raise, is dangerous because the hand could easily get checked around. This would be a truly awful outcome – you will have allowed both opponents to get from the flop to the river for a mere \$20 apiece. However, if you now bet on the blank card it will look rather suspicious and your opponents are unlikely to give you much action, even with decent hands.

It should be clear from this that you can get into a tangle by check-calling the flop. The main reason is that you are out of position. Such a play becomes more defensible when you have position on the opposition.

Thus the choice is between trying for a check-raise and betting out. The most obvious play is to go for a check-raise. If you check, TheRabbit is

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likely to check and then Cyprus will probably bet, allowing you to check-raise and put pressure on TheRabbit. This is a reasonable plan but, as we saw above, it cannot be taken for granted that Cyprus will bet. Even if this was the only consideration here it should tip the balance in favour of betting out.

However, there is a further point. If you bet the flop, TheRabbit will probably call. Since Cyprus is aggressive, there is a chance that he may now raise. Indeed, if he has made a half decent hand or hit some kind of draw then this is likely. Now, of course, you re-raise, which achieves the same goal as playing for a check-raise in the first place but now you have encouraged everyone to put an additional \$20 in the pot. Since you are almost certainly winning at this point, this is good news.

Betting out is the optimal play. It puts the most pressure on the opposition and creates the best chance to build the pot.

Flop: 9♦-6♥-2♣. You hold 10♥-8♥.

Question 3. (a) 5 (b) 25 (c) 15

This is a very reasonable flop for you. You have a gutshot, an overcard and a backdoor flush draw. This may not sound like much, but you only have two opponents, and no reason to think that either of them has a decent hand, or that they have connected with this raggedy flop.

When you have such a reasonable hand and the flop is unthreatening, check-calling becomes awful play and the choice is between betting and check-raising. You must now think about what your priorities are and which play will create the best chance to achieve them. Your objective here is simple: you want to get players out of the pot – preferably all of them. You need to give yourself a chance to win without making a hand, so you must get aggressive.

If you bet, what will probably happen is that MrRabbit will call with more or less anything. If Cyprus also calls then your bet has not achieved anything, and if a random overcard comes it is going to be hard for you play the hand accurately. It is also possible that Cyprus will raise in this situation. With a couple of good overcards this would be a natural play to create the possibility of a free card on the turn.

This scenario is also unattractive because you will probably have to just call and thus fall in with his plans. You could three-bet to put pressure on TheRabbit, but such a play is fraught with danger. You would be escalating the pot and tying players to their hands when you hold only a modest draw. Your chances of winning without showing down the best hand are then very small, and you have thus deprived yourself of a key component of your strategy.

How Good is your Limit Hold'em?

Checking is much better. TheRabbit will probably check and Cyprus will bet (it will be most surprising if he doesn't – but even that would be no disaster as you then get a free card with your drawing hand). After Cyprus bets, you can raise and put a great deal of pressure on TheRabbit. He will now be facing a \$40 call to stay in a \$190 pot, and even he will probably fold unless he really has connected properly with the flop.

Note also that by check-raising, you are strongly representing a 9. It is perfectly possible that Cyprus has just overcards. If you can get him heads-up on the turn and a blank comes, he is likely to give up if he cannot beat a pair of nines at that stage.

It is interesting to compare the answer here to that in Question 2. There you had made a very strong hand and the best play was to bet out. Here you have a much weaker hand and yet the best plan is to go for the stronger play of the check-raise! Decisions in hold'em are not formulaic. You should not automatically make a strong play with a strong hand and a modest play with a modest hand. You constantly need to think about what you are trying to achieve and to anticipate how the pot may develop.

Question 4. (a) 1 (b) 0 (c) 5

As planned. You have enough hand to call but raising is a far better play.

Question 5. (a) 0 (b) 5

You absolutely must bet here. If Cyprus has just overcards he will probably fold. He will find it hard to believe that you do not have at least a pair here and is unlikely to invest \$80 (\$40 now and \$40 on the river) to find out.

Question 6. (a) 2 (b) 5

Of course the A♠ is a horrible card for you, but you must grit your teeth and bet. It is possible that this card has not helped your opponent as he might have a low pair or two high cards not including an ace. If that is the case he is likely to fold, and you will have stolen the pot.

Question 7a. (a) 5 (b) 0 (c) 0

Cyprus has a pair of aces or a hand that is even better and thus we need a 7 – completing our straight – to win. We can see six cards and can reasonably assume that Cyprus does not have a 7 in his hand. Therefore we have four winning cards from the remaining pack (44 cards) and we need the pot to be paying us 10-to-1 in order for this to be a worthwhile call. There is currently \$330 in the pot and it will cost us \$40 to see the river. This is only slightly better than 8-to-1 and so, purely considering pot odds, this is a clear fold.

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Question 7b. (a) 6 (b) 6 (c) 10

When we take other factors into consideration, the decision becomes much less clear.

1) If we do hit the miracle 7, the implied odds are rather good. We will probably be able to check-raise the river and gain a further \$80. If we could guarantee this, we would be getting \$410 (\$330 in the pot plus two further big bets on the river) for a \$40 investment at pot odds of 10-to-1. This actually makes the play very slightly profitable.

2) If we do draw out horribly on Cyprus he may, with a bit of luck, get annoyed – to the detriment of his future play.

3) We have shown a great deal of aggression in this pot. Calling now, rather than folding, will send a message to Cyprus – plus anyone else who happens to be paying attention – that we cannot easily be pushed out of pots. However, this factor has more relevance in live rather than online play. Players who play online are often playing more than one game or are otherwise distracted, and also move easily from game to game. Thus cultivating an ‘image’ is less important online.

4) There are very few players – even very good ones – who play an equally good game of poker whether they are winning or losing. Virtually everybody plays at least slightly better with a healthy stack, a good run of cards and some decent pots under their belt. When things are not running for you, it can be difficult to resist the temptation to loosen up in an attempt to recoup your losses. Thus it can be worth making an occasional ‘bad’ play to give you the chance of a lucky outdraw which may well improve your mood and help you to play better. Note, however, that such a play should only ever be ‘slightly’ bad.

In this particular example it would be reasonable to assume that you will always gain one further big bet on the river when you hit your 7. Thus you are risking \$40 to win \$370 with 10-to-1 pot odds. If this scenario is repeated 11 times, you will win once and gain \$370 and lose ten times and for a total loss of \$400. Thus, your negative expectation on the play is slightly less than \$3 (\$30 divided by the 11 times the scenario is played out). This is only one-tenth of a big bet and is thus quite reasonable. If the amount were to approach half a big bet then it is becoming a seriously bad play and you should look for other ways to improve your mood.

Turn: 9♦-6♥-2♣-A♥. You hold 10♥-8♥.

Question 8. (a) 0 (b) 5

Compared to Question 7, betting is now an easy decision. You have picked up a further eight outs with the flush draw, but it would still be

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very good news if your bet persuaded Cyprus to give up.

Question 9. (a) 0 (b) 5 (c) 0

We already know that we cannot push Cyprus out of the pot but, having picked up the flush draw, we no longer need to make pot odds calculations.

River: 9♦-6♥-2♣-A♥-9♥. You hold 10♥-8♥.

Question 10. (a) 1 (b) 5

The 9♥ is a scary card for Cyprus – not just because he will fear a flush but because you represented a 9 with your raise on the flop. He will thus be worried that you have outdrawn him (as indeed it appears you have), and may well take the free showdown. You will then have let a bet slip through your fingers.

Question 11. (a) 0 (b) 5 (c) 0

Raise?? Oh dear. It is perfectly possible that you have a 9 in *your* hand and yet Cyprus doesn't care. Presumably he can beat trip nines and – if he can beat trip nines – he can almost certainly beat your flush. He may have A-9 or he may have flopped a set. However, the pot is huge and folding is absurd. Call, but don't hold your breath.

♣ – ♥ – ♦ – ♠ – ♣ – ♥ – ♦ – ♠



TIP: When you have a modest-sized pot, with only one or two opponents and the board does not look threatening, then it is usually right to make a play for the pot with any half-decent hand. You may take down the pot straight away or set yourself up for a steal later in the hand. The combined chances of stealing the pot and actually making a winning hand are often sufficient for this to be a profitable play.