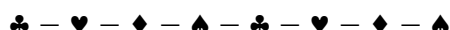


# Introduction

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There are many very good books on limit hold'em. Some are aimed at complete beginners, whereas others cater for experienced players who want to play at a more advanced level. This book is certainly not a book for beginners. It is aimed at players who have a reasonable understanding of the game of limit hold'em, and already have some experience of either online or live play. Specifically, it is about trying to move up from the low-limit games (\$3-\$6 and \$5-\$10) in order to compete successfully at the middle limits (\$10-\$20, \$15-\$30 and \$20-\$40).

I have been playing online poker for around three years, and I found it particularly difficult to make this move up in limits. Once I had learned the game I found that, after a few months, I could survive reasonably well at the low-limit level. I possessed decent pre-flop standards and could play competently beyond the flop, but no more. This modest ability was sufficient to compete as a small favourite in the \$3-\$6 and \$5-\$10 games.

However, when I tried to move up to the middle-limit games, I felt way out of my depth. In fact, due to a fortunate run of cards, my initial forays at this level were quite successful. However, things quickly turned against me, and I soon realised that I needed to understand the game much better to compete successfully beyond the low limits.

There are a number of hold'em books that address the problems that arise when playing at the middle limits. Such books often give excellent advice on dealing with specific technical situations. However, they often make the assumption that all of your opponents are of identical skill or all play exactly the same game. Some of them presume that your opponents are all solid and actually play rather well, whereas others appear to take the view that your opposition has just arrived from the local fish shop.

## How Good is your Limit Hold'em?

The reality of playing at the middle limits is actually quite different. You meet all kinds of players at these levels. As this is the highest limit on many online sites, you naturally will run into many very decent players in these games. However, you will also find many, many other types of player: solid, unimaginative plodders; decent players who call down too much; weak players; maniacs; very weak players; very weak players who are also maniacs; pre-flop maniacs who actually play sensibly post-flop; players who are addicted to the semi-bluff raise; untutored naturals who play strange cards but play them rather well; players for whom the only possible explanation for their play is that they are experiencing an altered state of consciousness, etc. The list is endless.

To be successful at the middle limits, it is not enough just to play a solid technical game. You must learn to identify the weak opponents at the table, and recognise the features of their play that make them weak. You then need to understand and utilise specific strategies to cope with their play and get their money.

However, the dynamics of the game complicate this further. You will rarely find yourself nicely positioned, playing a good hand, heads-up against a known weak and timid player. A more familiar scenario is that you find yourself in a pot with perhaps two other players, one of whom you may know to be a maniac, but the other may be a complete unknown, or perhaps you are aware that they are actually a very good player. If you can successfully handle the complex dynamics of such pots, then you will be a winning player at the middle limits.

These dynamics are what this book is about. In nearly all cases I will identify features of the playing style of your opponents in the hands. This may be a brief summary or it may be more detailed. Occasionally I will present you with an opponent about whom you know nothing. You must bear in mind what is known about your opponents when making the decisions on the hands. This is crucial. It is quite common for there to be a situation where it is correct to fold against one opponent and raise against another.

I have chosen to present the material in the form of complete hands and to flesh these out with hypothetical situations. Many other books are split into chapters on pre-flop play, flop play, turn play etc. There is nothing wrong with this approach, but I think that it is instructive to follow a hand through from beginning to end. After all, that's how we play poker. We don't spend one evening just playing pre-flop and the next just the river.

All the hands in this book are taken from online play. Many of them actually occurred more or less as given, but I have occasionally adapted

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some of the features to make a point. I have given the players in this book names which are emphatically *not* the handles of the players who were involved in the pots. Many other books refer to players simply by their actions, but I find this approach a little impersonal. It also becomes rather unwieldy when the author is reduced to writing something inelegant like: ‘The pre-flop raiser bets out and the pre-flop re-raiser now raises...’

I will offer the standard disclaimer that the names I have chosen are fictitious and that any resemblance to players living, dead or temporarily bankrupt, is purely coincidental. However, there are hundreds of thousands of online players, and it is inevitable that some of the names I have chosen here will duplicate actual player’s handles. I emphasise – this is purely coincidental.

Finally, I would like to thank Jim Brier, who is well known to serious hold’em players as the author (with Bob Ciaffone) of *Middle Limit Holdem*, and also as columnist for the *Card Player* magazine. Jim kindly agreed to act as ‘consultant’ on the book, and made many helpful suggestions with the explanations offered in the ‘Answers and Analysis’ sections of the book. I would also like to thank Andrew Kinsman, who did his usual fine editing job.

I am very happy to receive feedback on the material here and can be contacted at [byronajacobs@aol.com](mailto:byronajacobs@aol.com).

Byron Jacobs  
Brighton  
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