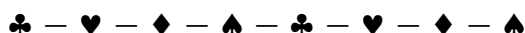


## Introduction

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It is now around 50 years since *How Good is Your Chess?*, a popular form of chess instructional material, was pioneered by Leonard Barden. In *How Good is Your Chess?* the reader was invited to take an imaginary seat next to a grandmaster in a recent game and deduce each of his next moves, scoring points according to the accuracy of their answers. At the conclusion of the game the reader was then instructed to tot up their score, and see how well they had fared, using a scorechart provided by the author.

I first had the kernel of the idea of writing a poker book along the same lines some years ago. Fellow chessplayers and the editors of this series, Byron Jacobs and Andrew Kinsman, came up with the idea independently. *How Good is Your Pot-Limit Omaha?* is the fruit of our discussions. It is intended to be the first in a whole series, each devoted to a different form of poker.

The book comprises 57 hands, each of which contains numerous questions for you to answer. In order to get the most out of this book, it is recommended that you work your way through all of the questions for each hand before checking any of the answers. You should not assume that the player of the hand, often myself, made the optimal choice. In this way you will come to each decision 'cold' and will avoid receiving any hint which will help you to answer the remaining questions in the hand. Thus, as far as possible, the play will follow that of a 'live' hand. The analysis of each hand appears at its conclusion.

In each poker hand there are only a limited number of decisions to be made, and only a few choices at each juncture. Should you pass, call or raise and, if the latter, how much money? This differs dramatically from chess where there are commonly 30-40 independent moves to

## How Good is Your Pot-Limit Omaha?

make in a game, every single one of which contains the choice of perhaps 20 or 30 different options.

This does not necessarily mean that poker is a much simpler game than chess. The skills required are of a quite different nature. Poker is closer to real life. Think back through your life so far and consider how many times you have had to make an important decision; it will not be very many. Your decisions will, as in poker, frequently have been based on inadequate data. By contrast, in chess everything is laid out before you.

One of the players who is frequently mentioned in this book, The Robber, once said to me: 'But you can't learn how to play poker from a book. You need to know the character of your opponents, whether they are winning or losing or emotionally upset.' Well, that is not exactly rocket science. This book primarily concentrates on technique. This is highly suitable for pot-limit Omaha, which is a highly technical game. The book may be particularly valuable in teaching you how to play on the Internet. After all, in online games, your opponents are faceless, if not nameless.

There are other considerations. The selection of a particular hand for use in the book, in itself warns you that there is some special point of interest. Whenever you fill in any questionnaire, it is possible to angle your responses in order to provide the required answer.

One more point. The players represented in this work are all hardened veterans. It is pointless making a subtle play against an opponent who does not know what time of day it is. It is hopeless to try and determine the motives of a tyro. Against such players you should simply put your head down and charge – just play the percentages.

Most of the players named here actually exist. However, I have simply forgotten the names of the participants of several of the hands described. A very small number of hands have been invented in order to examine a particular point. Thus this is, to some extent, a work of journalism. Often the players named have been provided with pseudonyms. Why should you be allowed a line on how a person plays for the mere cost of this book? Many of the hands took place at the Grosvenor Victoria Casino in London in the latter part of 2002 and first few months of 2003, after this work had been commissioned. The players there were amazingly co-operative about explaining their motives after I described the project. They will also have lied from time to time. Well, that's poker!

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Thus this book has turned out differently from what I had originally envisaged, and I am sure the editors are in for a big surprise. Now it is as much a diary of highlights from nine months at the poker table, as a sober quiz book.

You may well decide that you cannot be bothered to keep score for each chapter. Fair enough. I hope that you will still enjoy the cut and thrust of the play of the hands.

I have assumed that you already possess a grounding in pot-limit Omaha. If not, then I would refer you to my earlier books *Starting out in Poker* (Everyman, 2001) and *Pot-Limit and No-Limit Poker* written with Bob Ciaffone (Bob Ciaffone, 1999); and also to Bob Ciaffone's *Omaha Holdem Poker – The Action Game* (Bob Ciaffone, 1999). The only other worthwhile book on the subject that I am aware of is *Championship Omaha* by T.J. Cloutier and Tom McEvoy (Cardsmith, 1999). However, that book concentrates primarily on tournament play, an area on which I have touched only briefly in this book.

Many people are under the impression my two earlier books are largely about Omaha. This is not so, they are about poker. *Starting out in Poker* contains a glossary of over 700 poker terms, one of the largest ever assembled. It is not complete, poker is a living language and new terms have been coined since that book was published.

I have heard players say that they have never read a poker book and could learn nothing from such a work. Again, fair enough, they can look at the pictures. All I can tell you is that I have made a great deal of money as a result of my writing endeavours. Not sadly from the sales of the books, but because the writing process itself has forced me to think more clearly about certain situations.

When *Pot-Limit and No-Limit Poker* came out, I met a young Irishman, who swore at me, 'How dare you give away so many ideas just for the cost of a book? You should only have written such a work if you intended to retire.' Well, possibly at the age of 64, I may soon put away my money. It would be flying in the face of reason to believe that I am as good a player as I was 10-20 years ago. Meanwhile, I still enjoy playing poker and writing. I have managed to order my life for the last 24 years in such a way that I do not have to do anything that I do not find fun. So why stop now?

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