

## Chapter Five

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# Advanced Plays, Tricks and Moves

One of the key aspects to successful shorthanded play is to avoid playing in predictable and exploitable patterns. In this chapter, I will discuss a few measures to ensure that you cannot be exploited *that* easily by the better players. Most of this analysis is done from the framework of *my own* play, including the inherent weaknesses that stem from the strategies that I am using. So, by no means do I expect that these same countermeasures or advanced plays are needed in *your* game too – as your game's weaknesses may lie elsewhere.

## The delayed bluff/float

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If you play according to my big stack shorthanded approach, you will try to be in control of the betting at all times. However, as your opponents will probably be trying to achieve the same, there are a large number of situations where you have to respond to your opponent's actions.

Let's say that two of you are heads up. You are on the button, having flat-called a preflop raise by the under the gun player, with 100BB effective stacks. The flop comes 8-4-4 rainbow, and you have 7-6-5-3 single-suited (a hand that with deep money and position I would definitely have reraised with, but let's say for the purposes of this example that you have just called). Your opponent fires a two-thirds pot bet, with what very much

looks like a big pair (J-J-A-A), with a decent chance of a standard continuation bet with even less than that (say, just ace-high) and a slight chance of an absolute monster like 8-8-x-x. (Slight, because with top full not many players would come out making such a big bet with a hand that's clearly looking for action.) In this spot, many players would automatically raise with their inside wrap to bet the preflop raiser off his holding, while usually still having up to nine outs if called. However, this is not always the best option – in fact, it is rarely the best option.

What you should do here is look at your hand through the eyes of your opponent and how in his view you *would* have played the hand if you really had the big hand that you are now representing. Your opponent knows that if on this board you've got a hand better than kings up or aces up, you are probably not all that worried about getting outdrawn. Your opponent knows that *you* know that in all likelihood he has not raised UTG with a four in his hand, and that a more likely hand for him to have is just a big pocket pair that he is trying to protect. In other words, he knows that if you have him beat, he probably has two outs only – and thus you may not be all that eager to take the initiative away from him or try to make him fold. He knows that most opponents with 4-4 for quads or 8-8/8-4 for a full house would be happy to just call here, hoping that he will fire at least one more time – or, if he checks, will still *call* at least one more bet. What's more, he also knows that even with hands like 7-6-6-4 (three fours/no kicker) or even A-4-x-x (three fours/top kicker) you now have a very high probability of being best, you *still* might not want to build a huge pot on the flop. Given the depth of the money, you realize that if all the money goes in, you are almost certainly trailing, whereas if you raise here you will often induce folds from exactly those hands that you want to keep in.

So, as your opponent knows that on this type of board you would often flatcall with three fours or better, and given that you can actually have hit this three fours or better just a rather small percentage of the time, he might view a flop raise with suspicion. There's a good chance that he might plan to go all the way with just K-K or A-A here, simply because he "just doesn't buy it". In fact, if your opponent is a good player, he could three-bet here even with total air, knowing that given the betting it is unlikely that you have a hand that can comfortably play for stacks. And this means that a semi-bluff raise with your (probably) nine-outer may

have some clear drawbacks.

Therefore, you should usually not raise in this spot; I would prefer a call most of the time. Given this board that looks perfect for slowplaying a big hand, your opponent will definitely fear a call those times when he only has a big wired pair like queens, kings or aces – and if he has a weaker hand than that he will like this call even less. What he may do on the turn is:

### **Option 1**

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Fire a second barrel to show that he is serious about winning this pot. This way, he may get rid of the marginal hands like medium pairs or draws (say, the hand that you have) that were good enough to call one barrel, but not two. Betting a second time will allow him to get a better feel as to where he's at – or at least, that's what he might think. Almost certainly will he fold any of his marginal hands if you choose to raise here, simply because he would expect you to possibly bluff or semi-bluff *on the flop* – rather than on the turn, after two bets by him.

### **Option 2**

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Simply check, to see what you will do. This is usually done with hands of medium strength like the A-A/K-K/Q-Q mentioned. The goals: make you bet a lesser hand, give room for a possible float, avoid losing too much when his big pair is no good. The intention: check-calling any moderate-sized bets on the turn, to then re-evaluate on the river.

Assuming that this is the way your opponent thinks, it is imperative that you use this logic against him! These are some good ways to counter or exploit his thinking.

### **Response to option 1**

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Assuming a card arrives on the turn that is unlikely to have given him a full house (yet that also hasn't helped you), this *may* seem like a good spot to raise him – as he will fold often here. However, the problem is that it is very expensive if it fails and, especially, if your opponent has made a hand

on the turn like overpair plus flush draw or overpair plus open-ender, he may say: "Ah well, what the hell, let's gamble and stick it in. If he has me beat, he has me beat – so be it, I will still have outs." Yet if he makes this play he will have raised *you* off a hand that could have had up to nine outs to improve! Plus, the size of your raise on the turn may give away tremendous information. Three times his bet may look too scared, and just doubling his bet may entice him to stay in because of the good price. (*If I would raise in this spot as a semi-bluff, it would probably be around 2.3 or 2.4 times the initial bet.*)

An option that I like a bit better is simply flatcall one more time on the turn. Especially if the turn card hasn't produced a flush draw and thus you are unlikely to have picked up any additional outs in case you were drawing, this second call will definitely ring alarm bells in your opponent's head. After all, assuming he sees you as a good player, two flatcalls on a paired board with no apparent draws will make him think there's a very good chance that you are holding a very big hand, perhaps with an outside chance that you have taken a passive line with A-A-x-x or K-K-x-x.

Assuming he doesn't have a four and doesn't get any help on the river, he will probably check, and expect you to simply check back any big pairs that you might have – hands that are good as a bluff catcher, but definitely not ones to value-bet with. This means that if you *do* bet now, all from your opponent's assumption that you would probably have dumped a draw against his turn bet, there is basically no way you can be bluffing and thus *must* be betting for value here.

A few things that are important here. First, at the most basic level, it could seem that with a big pair, your opponent would have a good bluff-catcher on the river. Assuming that the river is a blank that has not completed any apparent draws, a typical way to play a marginal hand like kings or aces up would be to check-call on the river to snap off a bluff.

However, as this opponent is thinking on a higher level, he knows that you are unlikely to chase a draw on both the flop and turn when the board is paired – even more so because 7-6-5-x happens to be the only draw available. Basically, what his bet on the turn suggested (assuming the read of him having a big pair was right) was a last attempt to take down the pot, where in case of a call he would only put any more chips into the pot if he would actually improve to top full. In other words: an ideal situation for

you to go for the delayed bluff – where if a blank comes on the river you will make a standard 50-60% pot bet to take it down. (And if you are *really* creative, maybe make an even smaller bet if you have actually improved to a straight on the river. If you make a bet between one-fifth and one-third of the pot, then this may definitely look like a milking bet to him, and he will know that given the board there is hardly a hand he can still beat. But the bet being so small, and check-folding to such a small bet looking not just weak but also being bad for the ego, it could very well work. He may rationalize this bad call by thinking or even saying: “Well, if I am going to start check-folding decent hands to even these tiny bets, in the future people will start to take all kinds of shots at me. And I cannot let that happen, so I must simply call here.”)

## Response to option 2

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The reason why the delayed bluff from above may work is the type of holding that your opponent probably has. With just a big pair on a paired board, your opponent may feel that this is typically the type of hand that will win small to decent-sized pots when there's betting and calling on one street, sometimes also when there is betting and calling on two streets (usually when the big pair would work as a bluff catcher, and the check as a bluff-inducer), but that will *lose* almost all the big pots when his opponent will put money in the pot on all three streets. After all, on a 4-4-x-x-x board with no apparent draws, he may judge it as highly unlikely that his big pair can still be good if after all the flop and turn action his opponent will still bet the river. And while this view is of course a good and logical one – it may allow *you* to use this thinking against him by pulling off a bluff in a situation where a bluff seems highly unlikely.

Given the way your opponent thinks, he will rarely play check-fold on the turn, assuming this is not a seven, six or five. Any check-folds by him will tend to take place on the river with this hand, not on the turn. The psychology is this. As he has fired just one time (on the flop), you *could* have called rather lightly with a smaller pocket pair, the 7-6-5-x draw or even a float, in addition to of course all the three of a kind or better hands that you might have. If, in this situation, he would often play check-fold on the turn, he would be *inviting* people to float him. So, if he really has a big pair, you can expect that any checks by him on the turn will almost always be

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followed by a *call*, rather than by a fold. Of course, after his check-call on the turn you may still have a decent bluffing opportunity on the river. However, the pot has now grown big, and you will therefore have to bet big. Plus, you may still get called rather frequently, as your opponent may feel that he could have lured you into semi-bluffing or bluffing because he surrendered the initiative to you on the turn. In other words: the chances of you bluffing successfully on the river are substantially higher after *you* have called *his* turn bet, than after *he* has check-called *your* turn bet. Strange, in the eyes of some – but undoubtedly true.

What all of this means is that in this situation, you should almost always respond to a check by him after a blank on the turn by simply checking it back, rather than try to pick up the pot after this weakness that he has shown<sup>10</sup>. You should simply take the free card that you are given. However, in contrast to your response to option 1, this time you would *not* go for the river bluff. Say that the river is another blank, and your opponent checks – this time it is highly likely that he is using his big pair as a bluff catcher. (After all, with so little betting of any significance up to this point, a “bet out of nowhere” by a busted draw or a weak holding may be just as likely in the eyes of your opponent as a slowplayed monster.) So, in this situation, you would not make any kind of bluffs on the river. You would only bet the river for value if you have actually made your straight. And this time, in contrast to situation 1, you would *not* make a very small bet with your straight like the one thirds or even one fifths of the pot from before. No, this time you would simply make a standard bet in the range of 60-70% of the pot. And because your opponent may view that this could very well be a bluff, and given that he will have played the hand according the simple rule of thumb “bets on two streets may mean my hand is still good, bets on all streets smells trouble”, you can expect to get called by a losing hand a significant percentage of the time.

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<sup>10</sup> Please note that had the flop action been multiway, this would have been a good spot to pick up the pot. Because now, from the perspective of your opponent, the “only hands that can call me on the flop must be hands that have me beat” – making your turn bet much more credible. But heads up, he will realize that he will get called much lighter, and that you may make a flop call in position simply to try to take away the pot on the turn.