10-15-2010


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Date of Approval: 10/15/2010

Date of Delivery: 5/03/2011

Director: Dr. Kleine

Director’s Department: Honors College
The game of poker has truly evolved over the past half a century. What was once known as a game of chance played by degenerates and second-class citizens, also referred to as gambling; poker is now one of the most popular games played worldwide. Players like Amarillo Slim, Doyle Brunson, Sailor Roberts, and Johnny Moss paved the way for today’s poker players, travelling through their respective states to find the next illegal game. During those days, games were mostly run by criminals making it extremely difficult to have confidence in the fairness of the game. Games could easily be fixed, rules could be unenforced, and many of these pioneers recount numerous incidences of being robbed, beaten, and held up at gun point. Sadly, there was no one to run to when this occurred since it would be foolish to report the matter to the police since it transpired during an illegal event. Without the trials and tribulations of these players, the game would have never reached the point it is today.

While the game of poker has been openly available for play in cities like Las Vegas and Atlantic City for decades, it has only recently become legal in the State of Florida. However, even when it became legal in 1997, you could not expect the same game you would receive in cities notorious for their gambling. These first games, following 1997, were restricted by a cap-limit on the size of the pot, $10! That’s right; the size of the pot during any specific hand could not exceed the value of $10. This put a real damper on the potential growth of the game throughout Florida. There were no caps on pots anywhere else in the country (besides Montana with a $300 pot cap), and doing so sucked all the skill and profitability from the game. In other cities, states, and countries where poker was legal, pots could reach tens of thousands of dollars, but unfortunately, in Florida, this was just not the case.

Then, in 2007, poker in Florida witnessed another inflection point. Due to the widespread popularity of a form of poker known as No-Limit Texas Hold’em, the Poker Laws in Florida were reformed. No-Limit Texas Hold’em is a form of poker that allows players to bet all of the money in front

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1 Books such as Doyle Brunson’s Super System, which is considered the bible of poker, as well the book Deal Me In, which recounts the stories of 20 of today’s top poker players, tell the tale of these early pioneers as well as other poker stars who faced major adversity on their way to the top.
of them during any point in the hand as long as it is during their turn to act. Regardless of one’s poker knowledge, it is easy to see how a $10 cap on the pot could pose a problem to playing this game. And, it did. Until 2007, No-Limit Texas Hold’em was considered illegal throughout the State of Florida, and forced players to play limit games that could easily abide to the $10 pot limit. While, 2007 saw the legalization of No-Limit poker in Florida, there would still be restrictions that separated it from the games played in Vegas, Atlantic City, Biloxi, Mississippi, and other establishments nationwide and worldwide. The Florida Reform of 2007, while legalizing No-Limit poker, only allowed players to buy into a game for a maximum of $100 and buy into a tournament for a maximum of $880. While this was a step above the previous protocol, there still remained deep flaws with this logic. The reform made Florida the only place in the world with such a restriction on No-Limit poker. Finally, in July 2010, Florida uncapped their limits putting Florida poker on an equal playing field with poker venues throughout the world. Players would finally be permitted to join a table with an applicable amount of money to play the game correctly.

The goal of this paper is to: take a look at how the new Florida poker law allows Florida’s poker players’ of all skill levels, to hone their game and make a consistent profit, analyze the effect it has on the game of poker in Florida in general, and discuss the potential aid for Florida’s economy that can result. After doing so, the paper will conclude with a sample hand analysis from a cash game session I personally played. The goal of this analysis is two-fold. It is reasonable to expect that many people who will ultimately read this will have little to no previous poker knowledge or experience. The hand analysis will not be intended for these people to fully comprehend, or even partially comprehend. This hand analysis includes many advanced strategic explanations that require a basic understanding of the game of poker, as well as an intermediate strategic skill level. Additionally, poker entails a plethora of terminology. I have added many footnotes devoted to this, though without the experience of actually playing, some meaning is lost in translation. I will do my best to help you follow along. However, this
does not diminish your ability to realize the undeniable fact that success in poker is reliant on skill, not luck. If there is one thing I hope you walk away with after reading this, it would be to understand the faults of the ignorant stigma of poker being characterized as gambling, and appreciate the skill that is necessary to win at the game consistently, even if you may not possess this skill yourself.

For the poker player reading this, I hope my hand analysis gives you some insight on ways to improve your own game. Learning to broaden your overall thought process is essential to bringing your game to the next level. I know I am always looking for ways to improve my game, whether it is through books, talking with fellow players, or through some other means. While some of the concepts may be complex, seeing a real hand example will hopefully aid you in understanding how to apply the concept into an actual game situation. Enjoy!

July 2010 certainly was a groundbreaking day for Florida poker and Florida poker players. To someone unfamiliar with the game, the significance of what occurred at the beginning of this month was most likely misunderstood. Prior to July 2010, poker players in Florida were only permitted to sit down at a No-limit Hold’em (NLH) cash game with a maximum of $100. First, let me give an explanation as to what a No-limit cash game actually is and how it is played. No-limit cash games are primarily played with 9 or 10 people. All players are dealt two cards face down which are known as hole cards, or pocket cards. In order to induce action, certain players are forced to put up what are referred to as blinds, or forced bets. The player to left of the Dealer Button (D) posts the Small Blind (SB), and the player to the left of the SB posts the Big Blind (BB). These blinds rotate around the table after every hand. For instance, let’s say the player in seat 1 is the D. That means the player in the seat 2 is the SB, and the player in seat 3 is the BB. Action (moves that take place) begins with seat 4 who has the option to fold, call or raise. Folding, also referred to as mucking, is when the player decides the throw their hand away instead of placing required money into the pot to keep their hand alive. To call, a player
must put the minimum amount of money into the pot to keep their hand alive. During this first round of betting, this would entail matching the BB and is also referred to as limping. The third option is to raise and requires the player to place at least the double the amount it would take them to call. Now, other players must match this amount in order to keep their hand alive. There is no maximum to how much a player may raise since the game of choice is “No-Limit” Hold’em. If there is no raise during this first round of betting, the BB is given the option to either raise, requiring the players that have limped to match the raise, or check and send the hand to the flop.

The flop is three community cards that are placed face up in the middle of the table that all players may use with the ultimate goal of making the best five card poker hand. This occurs after the first round of betting where more than one player has a live hand. Action after the flop begins with the first live hand to the left of the D. The player has the option to check, or bet. Betting entails making an initial requirement for the round for players to remain in the hand. If no bet is made, players are always allowed to check. After the second round of betting, we are ready for the turn. The turn is the 4th community card placed on the table and is followed with another round of betting. If more than one player still remains after this round, we proceed to the river. The river is the 5th and final community card and is followed by the final round of betting. If at any time during the hand only one player remains, they automatically win the pot and the hand ends. If more than one hand is live after the final round of betting, we reach what is called the showdown. Remaining players show their hole cards, and the player with the highest ranking poker hand\(^2\) using any 5 card combination of the community cards and hole cards, wins the hand. If players have identical hands, the pot is split evenly among remaining players.

\(^2\)While I am not going into specific details about Hand Rankings, the details can easily be found in any poker book, or poker website. Hand rankings for NLH are the same as in the long time popular 5-card draw.
As stated previously, if a player’s bet is not called at any point during the hand, the bet is returned and player wins the pot uncontested with no need to show their hole cards. When the hand is

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3 Source: http://www.howtobuyfacebookpokerchips.com/hand-rankings/
over, the cards are shuffled and the blinds and dealer button will rotate to the left. The player in seat 2 will be the D, the player in seat 3 the SB, and the player in seat 4 BB. This rotation continues around the table indefinitely until the game breaks.

The value of the SB and BB depends on the table stakes. At a $1/$2 NLH cash game, the SB would be $1 and the BB would be $2 which represents the stakes. The table stakes never change throughout the life of a game. What makes cash games unique is the dynamic that allows players to come and go as they please. You may sit down to play, and in 2 hours, be playing with 9 completely new players. Learning to understand this dynamic and how it affects the flow of the game is essential to success at any stakes. In contrast, the other type of play available for NLH is a tournament. In a tournament, players buy in for a set amount of money and are only risking this buy-in. This is unlike a cash game where your risk is undefined; you can lose everything you have in front of you on any hand.

In a tournament, all players start with a set amount of chips that represent units, unlike cash games where players can start with different amounts and the chips represent actual money. A tournament continues until one player is left, or a deal is made prior to this occurring. During this process, the blinds escalate on a timed schedule and players are not permitted at any time to cash out their chips. The goal is survival, and as long as you have chips, you are still in. Players make money based on their finish relative to the entire field in the tournament. It is a general rule that around 10% of the entries cash. This means if there are 1,000 entrants, approximately 100 players cash. Payouts for tournaments are grossly skewed towards the top finishers, meaning reaching the final table, the last table to remain in a tournament, far exceeds your reward for simply cashing. To give an example of the structure of a tournament, the buy-in could be $100+$15 where $100 goes to the prize pool, and $15 to the house for

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Source: Arnold Snyder’s *The Poker Tournament Formula* was used as a guide for the explanation of the basics of NLH.

A game runs until it loses enough players. Usually this occurs when only 4 or 5 remain. The table is then broken and players are sent to empty seats at other tables with the same table stakes.
running the tournament. There may be 100 entrants, yielding a prize pool of $10,000. Players could start with 10,000 units, and the blinds could begin at 25/50 and go up every 25 minutes. The top 15 players may cash (15% of the field), and first place may be around $3,000. This is an example of a typical Florida tournament.  

Now that you understand the fundamental differences between tournaments and cash games (in tournaments your goal is to survive, and cash games it is to simply make money), we are ready to examine cash games play prior to July 2010. In order to so, it is imperative to not only have a basic understanding of what a cash game is, but also how stack sizes in poker dictate the overall strategy of the game. The term stack size is used to measure how much money (or units in a tournament) you have in relation to the BB. For instance, to reiterate, before July 2010 the maximum buy in for cash game was $100. If you were to buy in for the $100 at a $1/$2 NLH game, you would have 50 BB’s ($100/$2). The more BB’s you have, the more skillful the game becomes. Decisions become more complex, and superior players will ultimately prevail. The following chart characterizes stacks based on size:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stack Size</th>
<th>BB’s Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Stack</td>
<td>&lt; 40 BB’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Stack</td>
<td>41 – 90 BB’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Stack</td>
<td>91-199 BB’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Stack</td>
<td>200+ BB’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So, at the $1/$2 level, the maximum you can buy in for is only 50 BB’s, the low end of the medium stack range. Since stack sizes dictate the level of play, the small stack play takes a large chunk of skill out of

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6 Antonio Esfandiari does a phenomenal job outlining the differences between tournament play and cash game play in his book In the Money.
7 Figures for chart come from [http://www.thepokerbank.com/strategy/general/stack-sizes/](http://www.thepokerbank.com/strategy/general/stack-sizes/). While there are no set standards for characterizing stack sizes in NLH, I found this to be an efficient classification that I do not think any experienced player would disagree with.
the game. Well-timed bluffs become nearly impossible, while waiting for a big hand loses its appeal since you can only make what you have in front of you. The game is diminished to gambling. Taking into consideration the low stakes and small stack sizes, looking to have consistent success of any serious magnitude is a difficult task no matter how skilled you may be.

Additionally, there is one factor we have failed to discuss yet, the rake! The rake is the fee taken by the card room for running the game. Unlike other casino games where the player is betting against the house, poker is player versus player. The house is completely indifferent towards who wins since they make their money simply by people playing. The rake is usually represented as a percentage of the pot up to a certain amount. In Florida, the common rake is 10% of the pot up to $5. This means, the maximum the house can rake on any given hand is $5. The following chart represents the rake in Florida cash games:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pot</th>
<th>Rake</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;$10</td>
<td>$1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$11-$20</td>
<td>$2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$21-$30</td>
<td>$3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$31-$40</td>
<td>$4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$41&gt;</td>
<td>$5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are other variations in which players may pay a fixed amount on a timed basis. This is usually reserved for the higher limits and is not common in Florida. So you may be thinking, what is the importance of understanding the rake? Well, in order to win at poker consistently, you must not only be

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8 Rake figures come from my own knowledge of play in Florida poker.
better than the other players at the table, but good enough to beat the rake! Let’s take a look at the overall impact the rake truly has on a $1/$2 NLH cash game.

You sit down at a $1/$2 NLH game, pre-July 2010, with the maximum $100. You look around and see a few players with more money than you, but most with less. You realize the average chip stack is about $70. Since it is a 10-handed game, this means there is about $700 on the table. Taking into consideration this scenario, let’s analyze the impact the rake will have on the game. On average, you should see about 25 hands an hour (with good dealers, 30). The large majority of pots will exceed $41, meaning the house will rake the maximum $5. So, let’s say the average rake is $4. $4 at 25 hands an hour means the house is raking $100 an hour. If you play for 6 hours, that’s $600, resulting in almost all the money that was originally on the table falling victim to the rake. If you take into consideration, tips and how most houses drop $1 a hand into a jackpot collection, all the money that was originally there, is now gone! In order to beat the rake at a game like this, you not only have to be good, you must be exceptional on a regular basis.

Now that you have a better understanding of the challenges facing $1/$2 NLH before July 2010, we can delve into the difficulties that resulted in the high stakes. The next level up, prior to July 2010 in Florida, was $2/$5 NLH. Even though we have moved up a level, the maximum a player can buy in for is still $100. This results in a stack of only 20 BB’s. While many tournaments find the average stack to be somewhere around 20 BB’s from the middle of the tournament on, there is an element involved that allows poker to still be played. The deeper you maneuver your way through a tournament; the more scared people become to get knocked out. This fear for survival allows for more skillful players to take advantage of others. Unfortunately, this fear does not exist in a cash game. Quite the opposite actually exists since most players are there to gamble. This makes it very difficult for a skillful player to exploit others with their advantage. Only having 20 BB’s leaves you no room to bluff and rewards you minimally
for a strong hand. The game is reduced to gambling. You better have deep pockets to attempt building a deeper stack in these conditions. Even if you manage to do so, no one else will have a large stack making yours inconsequential. The situation only worsens when you move up to $5/$10 NLH (yes, they indeed had these limits where you could only start with 10 BB’s!). The irony is that the Florida legislatures, when asked for their reasoning behind the $100 max buy-in law, exclaimed that it is because poker is a game of luck and afraid of seniors and retirees wasting their Social Security on gambling. While I can understand their concern, capping the buy in at $100 is what indeed forced poker into a game of luck.

Now, I am sure that some of you are still convinced that poker is indeed a game of luck, and that the amount you are allowed to buy in has no impact on the game. Well, if you don’t believe me, just ask any professional. You would be hard-pressed to find any professional poker player playing a cash game in Florida prior to July 2010. What might that reason be? Simply put, it just isn’t worth their time. The increased element of gambling that is infused into the game with the buy-in cap would result in a long-term hourly profit far below that of which they are accustomed to in a regular cash game. Basically, it is just bad business sense. While there may be an element of luck in a regular cash game, when approached correctly, this luck is the exception not the rule. Skill always trumps luck in the long run.

As you can see, those years prior to July 2010 not only made it very difficult to make money playing poker, but also made it very difficult to improve your game. Poker is a game of experience, and the only experience Florida poker players could receive, was from a game of very little skill and no other realistic application. In fact, playing in cash games prior to July 2010 only worsened people’s skill since it would create a thicker barrier when forced to learn how to play in a real cash game with 100 BB stacks. Players became so accustomed to the action with the minimal risk of having a small stack, that making the necessary adjustments to learn to play properly after July 2010 could easily be more difficult than learning the game from scratch. Bad decisions would be so imbedded in their thought process, it could
pose many difficulties to try and crack the habit. Fortunately, there is still a light at the end of the tunnel. Many players are not at this point of no return. Following July 2010, these players could begin to get the experience necessary to improve their game. Players who have already done so, can now work on consistently building their bankroll\(^9\), and take their game to the next level. Florida poker players now have the opportunity to play poker the way it is was intended.

So, how exactly have things changed? Well, first, the hours poker rooms throughout the state are allowed to remain open has increased. Rooms are now permitted to remain open 18 hours a day during the week compared to the previous 12 hours a day, every day of the week. They are now allowed to stay open during the entire weekend, 24 hours a day\(^10\). This saw a rise in Florida poker revenue of 35% from June to July of 2010. “These numbers do not include the Seminole casinos in the state that most likely have seen the biggest increases in their poker revenue\(^11\).” The second principal transformation in July 2010 is the poker games that will now be legal to play. Previously, poker rooms were only allowed to offer small limit games for Hold’em, seven card stud variations, and Omaha variations, as well as NLH. However, the law reform permits basically any form of poker. This includes the components of HORSE\(^12\) as well as newly popularized Badugi\(^13\). The third change we have not discussed yet is the modification to the tournament rules. Previously, the maximum buy allowed for a tournament was $880. This kept the World Series of Poker (WSOP) as well as the World Poker Tour (WPT) from holding events in Florida. The WSOP hosts Circuit Events monthly throughout the country that involve somewhere around 10-15 events and culminate with a $1,500+ main event. The WPT hosts some of the most prestigious events known to the game, with their main events being $10,000 buy-ins.

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\(^9\) A bankroll: funds one has saved up that are devoted to poker.
\(^12\) HORSE: a mix of games including limit Hold’em, limit Omaha H/L, Razz, Stud, and Stud H/L, all different forms of poker.
\(^13\) Badugi is a limit form of poker where players are dealt 4 cards and draw to make a hand with 4 different suits and the smallest cards (Ace plays low). A234 of all different suits would be the best possible hand.
\(^14\) Source: [http://espn.go.com/sports/fantasy/blog/_/name/poker/id/5195764](http://espn.go.com/sports/fantasy/blog/_/name/poker/id/5195764).
July 2010 saw this cap lifted leaving the amount limitless. The WSOP and WPT wasted little time taking advantage of the opportunity. The WSOP brought their Circuit Events to Florida over a two week span in February 2011. Palm Beach Kennel Club hosted the events witnessing a gathering from players around the world to take part in the biggest tournaments Florida has ever seen. Hotels were booked throughout the surrounding areas as players competed for big cash prizes and WSOP rings. The series culminated with Palm Beach Kennel Club signing a contract to host these same events for the next five years. April 2011 brought the WPT to Florida for the first time for almost 4 weeks’ worth of events. The Seminole Hard Rock in Hollywood, FL played host and drew professionals from all around the world for their prestigious $10,000 main event.

It is easy to see how the July 2010 poker law reform can potentially assist Florida’s economy. With Florida leading the way in the real estate collapse that triggered the depression of 2008, it is important that the state be proactive in facilitating a statewide recovery. The changes active as of July 2010 are a step in the right direction. Florida poker revenue had an initial spike of 35% and should only continue grow. Nevertheless, it is the secondary effects that can result from this reform that will ultimately provide the most aid. Major tournament series fill up hotels in the surrounding areas as well as offer a boost to local businesses. The reform may also be the first step towards actual gambling becoming legal throughout Florida. There’s no telling the economic benefits that can result from legalizing slot machines, blackjack, as well as other games of chance. Florida would instantly become the premier tourist destination in the country bringing a city like Daytona Beach back to its glory days. Places like Las Vegas and Atlantic City are exclusively known and visited for the gambling and nightlife. Florida’s cities would be able to offer tourists a more family-like experience in addition to the gambling and nightlife. It is also important to note the April 2011 banishment of online poker in the United States. If

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15 The warm weather, beaches, and tourist attractions, like Disney Land, are infamously known for offering the family experience
players choose to continue playing poker, they must do so at a live venue. This will not only have an effect on Florida poker players, but players throughout the country. Florida players will ultimately play more live, while players in states without poker will have to either move to a place with poker, or visit more frequently to play. This should definitely have some sort of affect of poker revenue in Florida. With these things in mind, it will be interesting to see the future economic impact the July 2010 poker reform has on the entire state of Florida.

Now that we have covered the basics of NLH, as well as the importance of understanding stack sizes, the rake, and the impact July 2010 had on Florida poker, we are ready to delve into the finer details of the game through a real cash game hand analysis. Poker is a thinking man’s game, so it’s no surprise that many top professionals come from an academic background. Of course you have top players like Daniel Negreanu who did in fact drop out of high school to become a pool hustler and professional poker player. But, there is a whole other side to the demographic of top professionals.

Chris “Jesus” Ferguson is one of the most notable names in the game of poker. He has a PhD in computer science from UCLA where is father is a professor of game theory. Allen Cunningham, 5-time WSOP bracelet winner, also attended UCLA, but for engineering. He did however drop out to pursue a career in poker. Andy Bloch was a member of the notorious MIT Blackjack team and received two electrical engineering degrees from the prestigious Ivy League school. Barry Greenstein, author of Ace on the River, received his Doctorate in Mathematics from the University of Illinois. This represents a very short list of players with extremely impressive academic careers, but is certainly still a testament to the intelligence and work ethic necessary to make it to the top of the poker world. Even those top players without remarkable degrees are still highly intelligent individuals.\(^{16}\)

\(^{16}\) Players’ stories can be found in the previously mentioned book *Deal Me In*, as well as other books and the internet.
Session Information: 1/14/2011 Seminole Hard Rock – Tampa, Table 26 - Seat 6, 7:30 P.M.

Starting Stack: $300

**Introduction to Session:**

Before sitting down at a cash game, it is extremely important to understand the demographics of the players you will most likely be facing. Essentially, will it be a hard (difficult) game or a soft (easy) game? Will there be action, or will the play be passive\(^\text{17}\)? Having a general idea of what you will be facing will help you better prepare mentally for the challenge. This session begins at 7:30 P.M. on a Friday night at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Tampa, FL. It is reasonable to expect, even before you take a seat at the table, that the overall play will be towards the weaker side. The majority of players at the Hard Rock’s poker room on a Friday Night are either recreational or hobby players. This means they either play for fun and are indifferent towards winning or losing, or look at the game as a hobby and are prone to making many mistakes. These are the types of players you want at your poker table. At $2/$5 NLH, there will be very few players (percentage wise) playing on a Friday night, that would be considered a skilled player there to make money. This means that it is a great night to look at making a big profit!

I decided to buy into the table with $300, or 60 BB’s while the Hard Rock allows you to buy in for $200-$600. After reading the explanation on stack sizes, I am sure many of you are curious as to why I only bought in for $300 instead of $600. There is still one crucial concept we have yet to discuss, bankroll management. While I won’t go into great detail, it involves exposing yourself to only a certain percentage of your bankroll. While I would love to have the opportunity to have as deep a stack as possible, when this session took place my bankroll was not able to sustain the risk of buying into the table for the maximum. Instead, I felt more comfortable buying in for only $300. Since most players at

\(^{17}\) Passive: a type of style of play of a player or table. It means there is very little raising and much more calling.
the table did not have much more than this, it would make little difference anyways. Hopefully, it won’t take long for me to build my stack to the $500 I would have liked to buy in for to begin with.

**Hand 12: Js8s**

A middle aged man with about $250 behind limps from UTG. Everyone folds around to me on the SB and I look down at the J8 of spade. I’ll come up with any excuse to call $3 in the SB, and with a hand like J8s it’s a no brainer. The BB checks and we see a flop.

The flop comes:

Not a bad flop three handed, but I see no reason to bet and would rather see what the man UTG decides to do. So, I check and the BB checks as well. As I suspected, the man UTG bets $10. Unconvinced I am beat at that moment since I haven’t seen enough hands to make me believe otherwise, I call and the BB folds.

Turn:
Not a very good card for me. If he has QT, he makes his straight, not to mention there are many hands he could have been bluffing on the flop with that now allow him to feel comfortable betting the turn when the 9 hits (T9, T8, Q9, so on). Since I am still in the process of feeling out the table, as this is the first hand I’ve actually played, I check to the man. He immediately bets $25 and it’s time for me to fold my hand. There are very few hands except a complete bluff, and he didn’t come across as that kind of player. After playing with him for many hours following this hand, I am almost certain there is no way my hand was good.

Hand 18: AQo

After almost 2 rounds, I finally look down at a hand that I can actually raise with. Seat 4 and 5 fold and I open up the action, raising to $20. Seat 8 throws $20 in, disgusted after losing a big pot the hand before. Everyone else folds and the two of us see a flop heads-up.

The flop comes:

Seat 8 only has $100 left behind him which definitely has a huge impact on my thought process and the way I play this hand. My first thought is, the last thing I want to do is continuation bet $30 only

Bluffing: a player betting with an inferior hand with the hopes of everyone folding, winning them the pot.

Heads-up: there are only two players total left in the hand.
to have this man on tilt\textsuperscript{21} move all-in for his remaining $100. I would have no idea whether he had the King, two spades for a flush draw, JT for a straight draw\textsuperscript{22}, and I would almost be forced to call the $70 no matter what. To avoid this problem, I decided checking would be the better route. It allows him to try and bluff at the pot with nothing, and also allows me to call the flop and then bet the turn when the draws don’t hit, only allowing him to see one card unless he wants to get his money in badly\textsuperscript{23}. Surprisingly, he checks as well. Now, I have some history\textsuperscript{24} with this gentleman. This history would lead me to believe that this check means he has nothing. If he had a draw, he would most likely bet hoping to take the pot down after my weak check.

Turn:

Now I have 3-of-a-kind queens. At this point, betting would seem quite frivolous. He will most likely fold, still upset after losing the previous hand. Once again, it seemed like the right play to check and allow him to try and buy the pot\textsuperscript{25}. It is important to note the fact that the man is still on tilt from the hand before. This almost ensures the fact that when I check to him twice in a row, he won’t be able to resist stabbing\textsuperscript{26} at this pot after losing the last one. Sure enough, he buys the bait and bets $30. Now,

\begin{itemize}
  \item A continuation bet: a player follows up a raise pre-flop with a bet on the flop.
  \item Tilt: a player losing their cool and playing poorly because of it.
  \item Draw: when a player does not having a hand yet, but the potential of making a hand. A straight draw means a player is one card away from making a straight, while a flush draw means a player had 4 cards of the same suit and needs one more to make a flush.
  \item Getting your money in badly: when a player is behind and does not have the correct odds to call with their current hand.
  \item History: previous hands people have played with each other.
  \item Buy the pot: when a player bets with the hopes of winning the hand with their bet. They may be bluffing or actually have the best hand.
  \item Stabbing: attempting to steal a pot when a player(s) show continuous weakness (checking).
\end{itemize}
at this point it is still possible he has some kind of draw, but equally likely he has nothing. The previous history led me to believe that he would not follow up his bluff on the turn with another bluff on the river, so it seemed like the right idea to put the rest of his $70 to the test, not allowing him to see a free river without paying. The second I announce “All in,” he just as quickly folds his hand. In hindsight, it might have been better to just call and at least give him the opportunity to bluff the river. It is almost a certainty I had him drawing dead or very, very slim. Either way, I am fairly sure I was able to maximize my profit in this hand and move confidently on to the next one.

Hand 23: 54o

Up until this point, I have only raised 1/23 hands or 4.4% which is much more conservative than my norm. When seat 1 limps, and it folds around to me on the button, I find this as a good opportunity to open up my game and raise with a hand I wouldn’t normally do so with. If seat 1 isn’t the weakest player at the table, he sure is one of them. So, I am more than happy to isolate any hand in position I can with the hopes of outplaying him post-flop. If he has a pocket pair, the likelihood of him flopping a set is 1/7.5 or roughly 13%. Other hands only connect about 1/3 or 33% of the time. So when he checks the flop and I continuation bet, I should be winning this pot a large majority of the time. Not to mention, this is a great way of setting up the table for later. Unfortunately, the blinds call the $20 as well as seat 1 and we go 4-handed to the flop.

27 Drawing dead: The player has no chance of winning the hand by showing down. There are no cards they can hit on the turn or river to win without betting the other player(s) out.
28 Isolate: attempt to get everyone else out except myself and another player.
29 Set: when you have a pocket pair and make 3-of-a-kind.
The flop comes:

\[\begin{align*}
\text{10} & \spadesuit \\
\text{9} & \spadesuit \\
\text{2} & \heartsuit
\end{align*}\]

As quick as seat 9 goes all in for $70, seat 1 calls. Apparently I picked a wrong time to open up my game and muck my hand, cutting my losses.

**Hand 25: KQo**

\[\begin{align*}
\text{K} & \spadesuit \\
\text{Q} & \spadesuit
\end{align*}\]

Two hands later I get the KQo in the HJ position. After seat 4, 5 limp, I decide to get into the action as well. I normally don’t like to limp a hand like this (I would rather raise or fold), but at a table that thus far has proven to be quite weak (passive), I don’t mind playing a mediocre hand like this in fair position. After the button limps, all we limpers and the blinds get to see a flop.

**Flop:**

\[\begin{align*}
\text{10} & \diamondsuit \\
\text{9} & \spadesuit \\
\text{2} & \heartsuit
\end{align*}\]

After the blinds check disinterested, seat 3 bets $20. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity to see seat 3 play a few hands and knew he had the capability of betting quite light. With a lead out of $20
on this kind of flop, I felt he either had a straight draw along the lines of J8, 87, or a mediocre-weak\(^{30}\) T or 9. Seat 4 calls the $20, and now I am in an interesting spot. Seat 4 was an old man who played extremely textbook and seemed to be calling quite weak and only raising when he truly had a big hand; I put him in the same range\(^{31}\) as Seat 3. Since I have played very few hands during my time at this table, I decided to use this image to my advantage. I don’t like calling in this spot since I allow a hand like QJ to take away my K as an out and take away my ability to see two cards. While I won’t necessarily raise at a loose table, it seemed like the appropriate play at a table this passive. I raise it to $75. I think this is a very good raise because very few hands can call me on a board with this kind of texture\(^{32}\) allowing me to take the pot down right here, or play the rest of the hand out in position with cards that can help me. Not to mention, with how tight I have been playing, it seems everyone would be quite reluctant to call me anyways. There were only a few hands I saw calling me: QJ which I have dominated (about 70%-30%), AT which I have 9 outs\(^{33}\) against (giving me about 35-40% equity) as well as two pair, and a set.

Since I put seat 3 and 4 on pretty weak ranges, two pair or a set seemed out of the question (unless the blinds or button had it). So, if I do get called by a QJ or AT, I would be in good shape with position, but I was fairly sure they weren’t even that strong and would give me the pot. My theory proved right, the blinds and button had no hand, and seat 3 and 4 folded, giving me a nice $60+ pot.

**Hand 28: 7 7**

\[\text{\begin{tabular}{c}
\text{7\textcolor{red}{\spadesuit}}
\text{7\textcolor{red}{\spadesuit}}
\end{tabular}}\]

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\(^{30}\) Mediocre-weak describes my opponent’s kicker with their pair. A kicker is the players other hole card that is not a part of the pair.

\(^{31}\) Range: the possibilities for my opponent’s hole cards based on their style and the situation.

\(^{32}\) Texture: how “drawy” the board (community cards) is. A board with a lot of draws is referred to as wet; while a board with few or no draws is referred to as dry.

\(^{33}\) Outs: cards I can hit to give me the best hand.
Before the blinds hit me, I wake up with a pair of 7s in UTG+1. I limp, which is the standard play for a medium pair in early position, and a few more players limp as well.

The flop comes:

![Flop Image]

It's a beautiful flop for my pair of 7s, as I now have a set. After the blinds checked, I decided to get creative. Normally, I would bet $20, but I had a sneaking suspicion one of the players after me would bet and I would be able to put a timely raise in. Seeing this is 3 hands after the KQ play, I didn't think anyone would believe me and I could build a sizeable pot. Unfortunately, my suspicion was wrong and the players proceeded to check around.

Turn:

![Turn Image]

This puts 2 clubs on the board for a flush draw, but still gives me no reason to doubt my set of 7's. The SB bets $5, which isn’t even really a bet. I consider it the same as a check and raise to $20 which is what I would have bet anyway. This is no time to just call and give someone a practically free card with all those draws out there (straight and flush draws). Everyone folds to the SB in seat 3, the same player from hand 25, who calls.
River:

The flush draw misses, but at first, this still seems like a scare card since the straight draw connects. He can still have a 6 for a straight, but after seat 3 checks, I am fairly certain I have the best hand. I hoped the 4 gave him 2 pair or something so I could get a call on the river. I bet $25. In retrospect, I should have bet more like $40 or $45 making it look more like a bluff (a broken flush draw). I don’t see many scenarios in this situation where someone would call $25 and not call $40 or $45. However, he quickly folds, meaning my bet size was most likely irrelevant. Most players find themselves scared to bet the river after the 4 hits since seat 3 could have a 6 for a straight. But, after he checks to me, I was quite certain he didn’t have the 6. This means I don’t want to miss out on any value by checking since he might call with 2 pair if I bet and he thinks I’m bluffing. Against a more advanced player who I felt could check a 6 on the river, I might check as well, but not in this situation against a player I was positive would have bet a 6 and not check.

Hand 32: K K

The blinds pass and I am now dealt a hand on the button. The old man in seat 4 makes his first raise since I’ve been at the table (32 hands) to $20. The nice thing about players who rarely raise, is that when they do, you know exactly what they could have. Not only that, they don’t like to fold their big
hands. So, when I look down at K K on the Button, I know I am primed to win a big pot. I re-raise the old man to $65 and surprisingly, the BB calls. While I don’t have much history with the BB, he does have a reputation, and is known as quite the solid player (after playing with him many times since then, I don’t find this to be the case; a good player would have never called in this situation.) Knowing this, narrowing the range of hands he can have becomes quite simple. He doesn’t have a hand worthy of re-raising, with a raise and re-raise already ahead of him. However, it is a good enough hand to call. This makes it extremely likely he has either AK, TT, JJ, or maybe (a big maybe) at QQ. When the old man calls, his range falls in the exact same spot. He would re-raise with AA, so he must have AK, TT, JJ or QQ. Knowing this, the game becomes much easier; extracting maximum value or minimizing losses becomes a viable opportunity.

The flop comes:

With an Ace out there, this is not what I wanted to see. While TT, JJ, and QQ are still behind, AK has me destroyed and down to 1 out. This is where we can begin to run some actual probabilities and percentages. If you are dealt AK (off-suit, or suited), there are 16 different combinations for the suits that can make up this AK. However, it you put someone on a pair, there are only 6 different combinations of suits. So, if you put someone on AK or KK, there is a 16/22 or 72% chance of them having AK, and a 6/22 or 28% chance of them having KK. Knowing this, it is time to try and figure out the probability of one of these players having AK. Now, since I have KK, we have to take this into consideration when determining the probability. There are two K’s and four A’s in deck meaning there are 8 different combinations for AK. So the probability of one exclusive player having AK is 8/26 or 30%.
Since I put the BB on primarily AK or JJ, we can bring this number up to around 50% for him. Taking into consideration the rough probability of the old man having AK and we are certainly above a 65-70% chance of one of these players having AK (We could figure out the exact percentage, but that would be unnecessary. An estimate will more than suffice).

When both players check to me, I know better than to bet. There is a fairly high probability that one of these players has AK, and I am not looking to donate more than the $65 I’ve already put in. I check and we see a turn.

Turn:

Bingo! After thinking all hope was lost, the miracle card has hit! Now I know I have the best hand since I didn’t put either player on AA, the only hand that can currently beat me. So, at this point in time, it’s all about getting maximum value. The BB bets $55 and the old man in seat 4 calls. Obviously, one of them has AK, meaning they are drawing to two Aces. I had no idea what the other person had (maybe AQ or something), but it really doesn’t matter. They only had about $90 each left in front of them, and I don’t want to give either player an opportunity to fold their hand on the river. I announce, “All in,” and sure enough, both players call.

River:
This surely secures my victory.

**BB shows:**

The way the BB played the hand makes sense, and there was really no way for him to avoid losing the $200 he started the hand with. What the old man was doing calling the turn bet and then my raise, I have no idea. But, I have no problem taking a $150 donation. My three K’s hold up and I scoop a very sizable pot. The play of this hand on my part was very straightforward. I re-raised pre-flop with the 2nd best starting hand in NLH, checked the flop when the Ace hit, and then raised the turn to maximize my value when the dream King hit. Simple hand, but nice pot!

**Hand 50: Ad5d**

It’s been about a round and half since I have played a hand (with the exception of seeing a cheap flop twice with small pairs), and I find it an appropriate time to change gears\(^{34}\). Once again, seat 1 limps out of position and everyone folds to me on the button. As I’ve stated before, I will look for just about any reason to isolate in position with a player like this, and A5s is certainly a good enough one. I

\(^{34}\) Change gears: switch from playing conservative to playing aggressive, or vice versa. The reason for this is to confuse your opponents.
raise to $20 and the SB re-raises to $35. He has been pretty quite thus far, but still seemed to be experienced. When everyone folds to me, I see no reason not to call another $15 and see a flop in position. It is important to note the small re-raise he put in and the fact that we both had pretty large stacks, him at around $400 and myself at around $800.

The flop comes:

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Q♣ 9♣ 2♦
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This is a very interesting flop for me since I now have the nut flush draw. Surprisingly, he checks to me. It is very standard to expect a continuation bet from your opponent in this stop. This check could mean a few things: A) he could have a hand like JJ or TT and doesn’t want to bet only to face a raise and a difficult decision, B) he missed the flop with a hand like AK or AJ and plans on giving up on the hand, C) he is trying to trap me with a range of hands: AA, KK, QQ, AQ, or 99. I decided it was much more likely that his hand fell in the C category and didn’t want to bet only to face a sizeable raise. While I love my hand at this point, I still am a slight underdog to KK, JJ, TT (about 45% chance of winning), and a bigger underdog to AA, QQ, AQ, and 99 (around 35% chance of winning). I decided the right play would be to check and take the free card in order to avoid a check-raise\(^{35}\).

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\(^{35}\) Check-raise: a move in which the player checks and then raises the opposing player when they bet. It is supposed to be a sign of great strength.
Turn:

Now, I have the nut flush\textsuperscript{36} putting me in very good shape. The only hands he can actually have here that beat me are QQ and 99. He checks to me again and it’s time I try and build a bigger pot. There are very few things that beat me here, but many hands he may call a value bet\textsuperscript{37} of $50 on the turn. He could be slow playing As, Ks, AQ or have a marginal hand like Js or Ts, and I think it’s important to try and get value out of these hands on the turn. I bet $50 and the man thinks about it for a little bit and then folds. It is most likely he had a hand like AK and figured a continuation on the flop would yield a raise by me, making him have to fold. Either way, I believe I played this hand correctly, checking on the flop and then bet on the turn to ultimately yield the most value. It is important to realize that the player still could have had QQ or 99, beating my flush. Understanding your opponent and the situation may give you the opportunity to fold if that scenario were to occur. Fortunately, I did not have to face such a scenario.

It is also important to note how our stack sizes affected my decisions. If we both started the hand with $1,000, the hand would have played out much differently. In this type of scenario, if he were to check the flop, I would have bet $50 since a raise wouldn’t phase me in the same way. If he were to raise to $150, I could still call due to my implied odds\textsuperscript{38}. If you take into consideration his entire stack, I would be calling $100 to win almost $1000 making my decision a no brainer. I may even decide to re-raise depending on my read (it would be very difficult for him to call my re-raise with anything but QQ or

\textsuperscript{36} Nut Flush: The ace-high flush which is the best possible flush.
\textsuperscript{37} Value bet: A small bet made to induce a call.
\textsuperscript{38} Implied odds: Odds that not only take into consideration the amount of money in the pot, but also what you can make in later streets (turn and river) if you make your hand.
Hand 61: Tc8c

By this point in time, I have a pretty good grasp of the table and each players’ tendencies. Currently, the table is quite passive allowing me to take control more often. Everyone folds around to me in UTG+4. At a more loose-aggressive table, I probably wouldn’t bother with this hand, not wanting to commit chips to a pot with this mediocre of a holding and position. But, poker is all about understanding the situation and your opponents. With a table this weak and passive, I have no problem opening up the action and raising to $20 with a hand like this. Limping doesn’t really fit my style, and in my opinion a less effective play. It is either fold, or raise. So, raise it is. The blinds both call (both very weak players), and we see a flop.

39 A race: a situation where one player is all-in and called with around 50%-50% on who wins. (Also called a coin flip).
The flop comes

They both check to me, and now I have a decision to make. Do I check behind and essentially give up on the pot since I have nothing with no chance of making anything? Or, do I take a stab at this pot? Both players liked seeing flops, meaning they have a very wide range of hands in this position, many not containing a K or Q. Not to mention, neither player ever bluffed. So, I felt very comfortable betting this flop since there are few hands that will call me (a K, maybe a Q, JT, and the rare pocket 3s), and I won’t get played back at by a bluff. I continuation bet $35, and both players call. They both don’t have JT here so it is going to be very difficult for me to make another bet, especially with seat 1, the BB, being a trap artist.

Turn:

This gives me the opportunity for a J for a straight, but also gives JT the nuts. Both players check to me, and I have to check, assuming one player has to have a huge hand of either KQ, JT, or 3s.
River:

![Card Image]

Surprisingly, they both check again. I didn’t know if I was being set up, or if their hands were really that weak, and I wasn’t going to find out. I decide to check.

Players show:

![Card Image]

This gives them a pair of Q’s and they chop the pot. With where my table image was, I am not sure a river bet by me gets both players to fold. I probably made the smart move by checking but, those two hand holdings were by far the best case scenario for me. The large majority of the time, one of those players is much, much stronger.

**Hand 67: Ah7h**

![Card Image]
As I stated previously, the strength of the table dictates the amount of hands I will play. Knowing the players to my left are relatively weak allows me to limp in the CO with a marginal hand like A7s. At a table like this, I like the opportunity to see cheap flops and catch my opponents making a mistake post-flop. I limp, no one following me raises, and we see a 6-way flop.

The flop comes:

![Flop Image]

This is definitely a very good flop for me. An old man in the BB who just sat down bets $25, and it folds around to me. He has about $300-$400 behind him, making it a little more difficult for me to raise. I am not looking to race my chips off with the nuts flush draw and a) the old man was in the BB and could have anything including 2 pair b) old men do not like folding to me. Knowing these two things, it seems like the most logical decision would be to just call and reevaluate the situation after the turn. I call.

Turn:

![Turn Image]

I now have the nut flush and my life a whole lot easier. The old man, unfazed by the 3rd heart hitting the board, bets $60. Now, at this point, I still have a crucial decision to make. However, in this scenario, it is not whether I have the best hand or not (because I have the best hand possible with the river to come); the decision is how to maximize the situation (how can I make the most money in this
hand). Obviously, folding isn’t an option (I have the nuts40), so it is either call or raise. In order to make my decision, it is extremely imperative to try and figure out what my opponent could have. If he has a very strong hand, I should raise to get his whole stack. If he has a weaker hand, I might lean towards calling so I don’t scare him off with a raise. With his bet on the flop, he most likely has a J, or two pair, with the small possibility of him having a flush draw. The bet on the turn means it’s very unlikely he has just a J, since the turn brought not only a 3rd heart, but also an over card. So, his bet either means two pair, a set, or a lower flush. I didn’t think the likelihood of him betting a flush draw on the flop was high so, that leaves us with either two pair or a set, leaning more towards two pair. While mathematics can be used to determine the EV (expected value) of calling and the EV of raising in order to conclude which decision is superior, the decision I make at the table is purely based on feel. The manner in which the man bet the turn made me feel like he wasn’t going to slow down on the river and let me “bully” him. I put a little act on for about 30 seconds even though I really was deliberating about my decision, just not what he thought I was contemplating about. I call the $60.

River:

![Card Image]

This ensures the fact that I have the best hand possible (if the board paired, this would not be the case). As I suspected, he instantly bets $100. After “thinking” for another 30 seconds, I announce “all-in” putting the rest of his chips, about $200, to the test. He instantly folds making me believe I got maximum value from the old man. If I raised the turn, he would have most likely folded. The call on the turn got me an extra $100 out of the deal.

40 Nuts: The best possible hand with the current community cards.
Hand 91: JdJx

After going card dead for a couple of rounds, I come across possibly the most interesting and thought-revoking hand of the session. It folds around to seat 1 in the HJ who limps, which if you noticed, has been quite a common theme for this player, and most weak players for that matter. Seat 2 raises the action to $20. Now, it is important to note that the player in seat 2 is by far the most skillful player at the table, excluding myself. Therefore, it is essential to take a much more advanced thought process when going up against this player than the rest of the table. Seat 4 calls on the Button, the SB folds, and it comes to me on the BB. I look down at a pair of Js, a very decent starting hand. There are some situations I might just call, but many I am raising, especially this one and I’ll explain why. The player in seat 2 is certainly sophisticated enough to be raising with a very wide range of hands in order to isolate himself with the weak player in seat 1. He knows this, but more importantly he knows I know this. Most importantly, I know that he knows that I know this. It might take a second to wrap your mind around it, but learning to be a step ahead of your opponent is what poker is made of. I know that he knows, that I know he is raising with a wide range in this current situation (meaning he could have mediocre holdings like KJo, T9o). Now, it is important to note the $20 call in seat 4 has a severe impact on the hand. If there was no call from seat 4, there would only be $25 in the pot (seat 1’s limp and seat 2’s $20 raise). However, seat 4 calling puts the pot at $45. There is very little reason for me to re-raise with a marginal hand when the pot is only $25 since the reward is not worth the risk. But, when the pot is $45, there is a little more incentive for me to re-raise with a marginal hand with the hopes of taking the pot pre-flop. As an advanced player, I understand this strategy, but more importantly I know the player in seat 2
Phillips 35

understands this as well. What this means, is that he will be much more likely to put me on a marginal hand like AJ or AT in this situation then a strong hand like Js. This is very good news for me since my opponent will most likely attempt to outplay me later in the hand. As expected, the player in seat 2 calls the $75, ensuring his position against me for the remainder of the hand (seat 4 folds). We go heads-up to the flop.

It comes:

This is a very good flop for me against seat 2’s range of hands in this situation. He has a hand where he wanted to isolate pre-flop against a weak player, and then called my re-raise in position. His range is quite wide here, and most likely results in him having nothing at this point. So, the appropriate move seems to be a continuation bet, taking away his ability to see a free card with a marginal holding. I bet $110 and he almost instantly calls. The hastiness of his call makes me believe he doesn’t have much and wants me to believe he is stronger than really he is. It is certainly possible he has a low pair like a 6 or 5, or even just a hand like the AJ or AT that I predicted he might have me on. Calling with a hand like AJ, AT, KQ, JT in this situation is what we refer to as “floating.” What this means, is since he doesn’t have anything, but also doesn’t think I have anything, he plans on calling my bet on the flop with the expectation of betting me out of the pot on the turn or river. This is a very advanced move, but I am fully aware of what his plans are and hope to exploit him for it. However, what I do on the turn is largely based on the card that comes out. There are some cards, like a 3, where I will check and let him try and bluff. While other cards might come out that would make me inclined to bet.
Turn:

This is a fairly safe card since the only two hands that I put into his range that hit that card were AQ and KQ. I still beat a very large percentage of the hands that he can have here. The question is, do I check and allow him to bet (or he could check and take a free card), or do I put him to a decision now? He has $316 left in front of him and the pot is just around $400. So, if I make a bet, it is going to be for his entire stack. I decide that I don’t want to let him check and see a free card with a hand like 75 so I put him all-in. It is reasonable to expect that I will get called by many hands I have beaten in this situation. I know his read on me (he thinks I have AJ or AT), so he will most likely call with any pair putting me in a great spot. He thinks for about 30 seconds and then calls and says he just has a Q.

He shows:

, and I am in trouble. I need one of two Jacks left on the river to win the hand.

River:
My fate is sealed. Now, while I didn’t win this hand, I still think I played it correctly. Maybe I could have checked the flop, allowing him to bet and then go all in on top of him. Either way, it was just unfortunate that he had one of the two hands that I put in his range that beat me for this specific situation. I certainly feel like I have the best hand about 90% of the time when I bet the turn, and get called by many weaker hands since I know he put me on a bluff from the start. Sometimes, you do everything right and still lose, but that’s poker. If you do enough things right, you will still be a profitable player. On a side note, I would like to pay my respects to the player I faced in this hand. His name was Felipe and he died tragically in a car accident in February. He was 23. While I didn’t know him well, I am close with some people that did. He will surely be missed.

**Hand 104: AsQc**

![Card Image]

After losing the big pot, I try to stay calm, staying out of trouble until I fully collect myself. Playing poker is not about winning when everything is going right, but not compounding your losing when things are going wrong. The term we refer to in poker when a player loses his composure is “tilt.”

One of my goals as a poker player is to avoid going on tilt at all costs because, as experience will demonstrate, it can be quite costly. So, after seeing 3 limpers I have a decision. Normally, at a passive table, I would raise in this situation, but I decide to take the safe route and just limp. This can be a very profitable play since the strength of your hand is now disguised, and it is very cheap to get away from if you miss the flop.
Phillips 38

The flop comes:

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K
J
6
5
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netting a very interesting situation for me since I now have the nut flush draw. Seat 10 proceeds to bet $30 and now I am faced with another decision. Folding is out of the question since I have way too good of a draw to even consider that (I need a spade for the nuts, and an Ace might be good also). So, do I call or do I raise? I noticed the player in Seat 10 only has about $200 left, making it much easier for him to just stick in the rest of his money with a set or low flush. If he had more money in front of him, he would most likely be forced to smooth call all these hands if I decided to raise, completely changing the entire dynamic of the hand. However, the player only being $200 deep makes raising not as desirable of a play. I would price myself in if he goes all-in, meaning I would be forced to call the player’s all in, most likely with only around a 30-40% chance of winning the hand. I decide to just smooth call and hopefully hit my card on the turn or make him slow down and check, allowing me to check as well and see a free card on the river.

Turn:

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2
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Seat 10 quickly announces “all in.” I pretty much have no choice but to fold since there is no way I am getting odds to call against any hand he is going all-in with here. However, I gain some valuable information in this hand. Knowing this player’s tendency to over bet his hand like he does here, it will
allow me to trap this player in the future, calling the flop with a big hand and allowing him to hang himself by going all-in on the turn. So, while I am forced to fold and give up on the pot this time, I am given some vital ammunition for the future.

Hand 112: KQo

After seeing three limpers in front of me, I decide to limp with KQo and see a flop. It’s a decent hand, but being on the button makes it much easier to play more profitably. No one raises and we the flop.

The flop comes:

, missing me entirely. However, everyone checks and I see no reason to bet and we get to see a free turn.

Turn:
Now, I am in a much better situation. But, since we were 6-handed going to the flop, it is important to be extremely cautious. It is very easy for someone to have been checking a 5 on the flop and have me in big trouble. The same player from Hand 91 in seat 2 now bets $15 and it folds to me. At this point, there are a few things he could be betting. He can either have a Q with a lesser kicker, a 5, a flush draw, or a full house. I beat the Q since I most likely have a better kicker, and I beat the flush draw but lose to the 5 and the full house. Since I can certainly beat many hands he could be betting, I call the $15.

River:

The flush draw misses and my hand improves to Ks and Qs. He bets $30, and more or less, I make an information call. I don’t see any reason for him to be bluffing in this spot and for this reason, see no scenario where my hand is good. So, what this means, is that I know I am beat, but since we don’t have much history together, I am calling to find out what he has. I’m pretty convinced he has a 5 or better, but I am making a $30 investment for future benefit. I call the $30, and like I suspected he turns over:

He flopped a full house. The Q on the turn simply cost me $45, but hopefully I’ll be able to use the information I gathered from this hand in future situations.
It has been about 3 rounds now since I have raised a hand and fortunately, and I am at the type of table that will take notice of this. So, when seat 3 and 5 limp and the action comes to me in the CO, I attempt to take advantage of my image. I raise the action to $35, and surprisingly the old man from Hand 67, still in seat 9, calls from the BB. Everyone else folds and we go heads-up. My initial reaction is that he still remembers Hand 67 from earlier and is looking for some pay back. With this in mind, I don’t necessarily put him on a strong holding. Instead, I put him on calling with a drawing hand out of position hoping to hit a flop on me.

The flop comes:

Now, I am in really good shape. The chances of him having anything at all on this flop are pretty slim. There are no straight draws, no flush draws, and the only things he can reasonably call me with on this flop is a 3 (very, very unlikely), a pocket pair (possible, but still unlikely), and a 9 (unlikely). It is safe to say a continuation is going to win this pot instantly over 80% of the time in this situation. After he checks, I make a standard continuation bet of $50 and he quickly folds, proving my theory correct. The fact that I have nothing here is irrelevant. I was able to use my tight image to my advantage and take down a pot when I was almost certain my opponent had nothing. Not to mention, I was fully prepared
to make an even larger bet on the turn had the old man called the flop. This would have made it even more difficult for him to continue on with only a pocket pair (66, 77, 88, even TT) or 9 (his most likely holdings with a flop call). Most players would be afraid to continue bluffing in this hand after getting a call on the flop, but if you are going to expand your game and raise with hands like K4s, you must be prepared to fire a second bullet at the flop with nothing when the timing is right. I scoop the pot, and we move on to the next one.

**Hand 129: Tc7h**

The old man in seat 9 min. raises the pot to $10, 2 players call, and comes around to me on the BB. With just $5 to call, I am pretty much forced to play anything that appears even remotely playable. T7o fits that criteria and I throw another $5 in the pot.

The flop comes:

, and after I check, it checks around.
Turn:

```
6
♠️
♠️
♠️
♠️
9

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Do I take the initiative and bet this flop, or proceed to check and see what the rest of the table does, most likely giving them a free card when they all check? Well, there is certainly a possibility that I have the best hand at this point in time. And, if that is the case, I don’t want to let the other players see a free card that can beat me. There is also the possibility I am beat, as a lot of hands beat me in this spot. The nice thing about being at a passive table, is that a very small percentage of the time I actually get raised in this spot when I bet. So, if I am beat when I make the bet, I will only get called, allowing me to see the river and possibly make the best hand. It definitely feels like betting is the better option here as I negate the possibility of giving players a free card at a $40 pot. If I do get called, I can still be ahead (if they call with a hand like 87), or be behind (if they have a K for instance) and have the opportunity to hit my card on the river, like a 9 to make my straight. I bet $20 and the old man in seat 9 who originally min. raised calls. Well, it is pretty obvious what he has at this point. If he had a K, he would have bet the flop. So, that’s out of the question. He most likely didn’t min. raise with a hand containing an 8 or 6 unless it was a pocket pair, in which case he would have a set and raise. That means, the only reasonable hand he can have right here is a pair of Tens with a better kicker. T9, JT, QT, or AT suffice as possibilities. Everyone else folds and we go heads-up to the river. At this point, I know I am beat and really have no plans on trying to bet. He most likely isn’t folding to me due to his frustration from prior hands (not to mention old men just don’t like folding to me if there is even the slightest chance they can have the best hand). Basically, I plan on giving up and giving him the pot.
As usually happens in poker, plans change. I went from planning on giving up, to most likely having the best hand with two pair. Now, most players will automatically think that they should check here since their opponent only needs a 9 for a straight to beat them. But, by doing so, you allow yourself to miss out on opportunities for great value. As I stated prior, the possible hands I am putting the man on in this situation are T9, JT, QT, and AT, with T9 being by far the least likely. I consider it much more likely that the old man would be more inclined to min. raise with a hand like JT, QT, and AT. If we were to give equal weights to each of the 4 hands, there is a 25% chance of the old man having a 9. But, taking into consideration the likelihood of him actually having T9, it is more like 5-10%. That means, my two pair is good around 90% of the time! Now does it seem like a good idea to check? We have this old man who is looking for any excuse to call, and I have a 90% chance of having the best hand. What more can you ask for? I bet $45 on the river, a little oversized to make him think that I can actually be bluffing here. He doesn’t even hesitate to call.

Old man shows:

He has a pair of Tens just as I suspected. I turn over my two pair, T’s and 7’s, for the victory, scooping a decent sized pot even though I had all intentions of giving up going into the river. Learning
when and when not to make that questionable river bet where most players decide to check can be the difference that can propel your game to the next level. It is also vital to have the flexibility to change plans. There are times when you expect to give up and fall into an opportunity, as well as times when you are setting up a play and decide to just fold. Knowing when to abandon ship is crucial to playing well consistently. Stubbornness gets you nowhere.

**Hand 133: T9o**

Seat 1 limps, and I continue my objective of attempting to isolate against this weak player. At this point, I am literally looking for any playable hand, which T9o certainly is. When it folds around to me, I raise to $20, and unfortunately the blinds call as well as seat 1, and we go 4-handed to the flop.

The flop comes:

, giving me an open-ended straight draw (I need either a J or a 6 for a straight). All three player check to me and I am left with a choice. There is $80 already in the pot. I can take a shot and bet around $60 hoping to take it down now, or check and hope to hit my card on the turn, winning an even bigger pot. At a table this passive, the right play is probably betting here, keeping control of the hand, but I know I am getting called by a Q and a flush draw, and I would have to make the decision on the turn
whether to continue bluffing. Keeping in mind that these players do not like folding to me, I decided I would rather just check and take my free card hoping to hit my straight.

Turn:

Yahtzee! I hit exactly what I was hoping for with the 6! I now have a 10-high straight and the nuts going into the river. I am hoping to see a bunch of action before it gets to me, but unfortunately, all 3 players check to me again. Now, the only decision I have here is what to bet. I must get value from players double checking a flush draw and a Q, and essentially, just want to build as big a pot as possible with the best hand. $50 seems like a good amount since it is small enough to get called by mediocre hands and draws, but also is a big enough bet to get me some value by them calling. I am ecstatic to see seat 9 and 10 call the $50, and now I am just hoping to not see a diamond.

River:

I quickly find out that this was the best card in the deck for me. Seat 10 immediately bets $100, and it is pretty obvious he has to have a 5 here for an 8-high straight. The 4h gave him what he thinks is the best hand, but what he is about to find out, isn’t. I pretend to think for about 30 seconds before announcing “all-in,” since with only $160 left behind him, I am left with no other option. A minimum raise would only leave him with $60 more, and knowing he isn’t folding gives me no reason to not go for
it all. Actually, I wish he had something more like $300 or $400 behind him since I didn’t think there was any way he could fold his hand to me. Getting back to the action, he instantly calls me and is given the bad news as I turn up my T9. He mucks his hand, but it is without a doubt his hand included a 5. The moral of this hand is that I was able to take a situation where most people wouldn’t even play the hand and turn it into a $750 pot scooper. When you take the initiative at a passive table and aim to take advantage of weak players wanting to gamble and see flops, good things like this are just bound to happen. This hand wasn’t about me making some great play. It was just simply taking the initiative against a very weak player, making my hand, and getting paid for it. Sometimes, the game can just be that easy.

**Hand 147: AQo**

After going card dead for the past few orbits, I look down at a playable hand in AQo. Seat 4 calls (Seat 4 is a new player, an older man who likes to see flops, but appears to play extremely passive; a common theme at this table), and it comes to me in the CO. I make a standard play and raise to $20 and it folds to seat 4 who makes the call.

The flop comes:
giving me top pair – top kicker, but also putting 3 hearts on the board. Seat 4 checks to me, and I usually like to check behind here against a passive player. There is really no reason to bet when he will simply tell me his hand strength on the turn when he makes his decision. I check behind.

Turn:

Seat 4 checks again and I am pretty certain I have the best hand at this point. There is no reason to check and give him a free card to win the pot, so I make a standard bet of $30. He quickly folds and my theory proved correct as I scoop the pot.

Hand 169: Ac As

Two hands later, it folds around to me in UTG +2 and I look down at AA. It’s a great feeling to look down at them, but realize I probably won’t get as much action as I’d like since I haven’t played a hand in a few orbits. I raise the action to $20, and seat 8 and 2 come along to see a flop.

It comes:
which is not exactly the ideal flop for my hand (the texture is very wet). Seat 2 checks, and most players would feel inclined to bet in this situation. However, I am not such a fan of this. There are two reasons why. First, by checking, I keep the pot smaller and don’t allow a player to raise me with a hand like 76, 54, or A5d putting me to a difficult decision. I wouldn’t know if they had a set or one of these other hands and might have to consider folding due to the passiveness of the table. The second reason is I am able to disguise the strength of my hand. By checking here, none of these players are sophisticated enough to realize I could be doing this with a hand like AA for pot control. So, I allow myself to gain extra value from hands I beat by disguising my hand, while keeping the pot manageable and avoiding playing a big pot. Most people would argue that I am giving the other two players a free card to catch their flush with another diamond, or a straight with a 5 or 6. And, while I can agree with this, it is important to realize that even if I bet here, they aren’t folding hands like a flush, or 76, or 54. All I am doing by betting is allowing myself to get raised and play a pot bigger than I want to. By checking, I give myself a chance to actually fold the hand if a diamond, 6, or 5 hits, and I feel like I am beat. I decide to check, and seat 8 checks as well.

Turn:

![Card Image]

The 4s is definitely a great card for. Now, it is almost a guarantee I have the best hand, and it is time to try and extract some value on the turn after disguising my hand on the flop. Seat 2 checks and I bet $35. Unfortunately, both players fold and I take the pot down. I think I played this hand very intelligently, giving myself easy scenarios to fold if I am beat, and an opportunity to extract value with the best hand. It ended up leaning towards the latter, but neither player had a hand strong enough to
call my turn bet. It is situations like these where checking the flop instead of betting can boost your game. Too many players, approach this hand in too strong a manner, and end up losing more money than they needed to when their opponent flops a set. There are certainly many situations where I would consider betting this flop with this hand (if I were at a table where the history led me to believe that an opponent put me on a continuation bet with nothing and try to bluff), but not this situation at this table.

**Conclusion to Session:**

After about 6 hours of play, I decide to call it a night. I can feel myself getting tired and don’t want to force myself into making a costly mistake. It is important to learn your limitations and understand when your play is starting to deteriorate. Doing so and having the discipline to leave and come back another day, will save you a ton of money in the long run.

Taking a look at the session in totality, I was fortunate enough to be at a fairly weak table even though that is to be expected on a Friday night at the Hard Rock. I made some good plays, fell into some hands in some really nice spots, and was unfortunate to lose a fairly large pot. In all, I thought I played very well, making thoughtful decisions, and sticking to my game plan of exploiting the weaker players who wanted to see flops.

I ended up buying into the game for a total of $400 and cashed out for $1002 at 1:15 A.M. That’s a profit of $602 for about 5 ¾ hours of play. Not bad for a night’s work. I hope after reading this, even though you may not be as familiar with the game of poker as others, you can appreciate the complexity the game entails. On top of that, through this analysis, begin to understand the thought process that is necessary to beat the game of poker on a consistent basis. Poker is not game of luck. It is a game of skill with an element of luck. But, without that element, we would simply be playing a game similar to chess. There is a reason we don’t see a paralleled popularity in chess in our United States, as well as the rest of the world. You need look no further than this element. Anybody can catch a great run of cards and be
the big winner for a day. But, in chess, skill is the sole proprietor for victory. Against a far superior chess player, losing would not be an “if”, but a guarantee. Fortunately, the same cannot be said for poker.

To those who already have a basic understanding for the game of poker, I hope this analysis opened your eyes towards ways to improve your game. The game is continuously evolving, and if you do not strive to become better, you will simply fall behind. Having discussions with fellow players to analyze hands, such as you read here, is a fantastic way to improve your game and learn how other players think. The biggest mistake you can make at the poker table is to believe everyone thinks the same way you do. Undoubtedly, many players fall into this trap. Do not be that player. It is also a great idea to join poker forums online for the same reasons. You open yourself up to learning from thousands of players around the world. But, while this, among other things like reading books, are great ways to improve your game, nothing is a replacement for pure experience. Nothing is a better teacher than making a mistake, and the only way you can do this is by actually playing. So, while there are many areas you can look to facilitate your improvement, nothing will get you there quicker than experience and an open mind.

I would like to thank professional poker player, Gus Hansen, for giving me a great guideline for this hand analysis. In his book Every Hand Revealed, he outlines every hand he plays on his way to a huge major tournament victory in the Aussie Millions. I not only learned a tremendous amount from his advice, but was also extremely impressed with his approach in the book. It should come as no surprise that my analysis of hands follow a similar progression as his. His personality shined through his work, and I was inspired to take a similar approach.

I feel at this point in time, it is important to discuss a little bit of my background in poker. I feel as if it is important in order to validate the merit of my analyses. I grew up in a household where playing games of all sort were the norm. I played competitive chess from 1st to 5th grade and participated in as
many sports as possible. I played on one the top youth soccer teams in New York, as well a travelling basketball team. At the age of 12, after moving to Florida with my parents, I began playing online poker after watching the 2002 World Series of Poker. I was instantly inspired and quickly became a student of the game. I would spend hours on end learning the game and receiving my free education, while doing my own mathematical analyses of the game. During this time, I also picked up the sport of Bowling and finished 20th in the High School State Championships my senior year. By 14, my poker game began to immensely improve and I managed to turn $1 I earned in a freeroll41 into $1,000. I also final tabled an $11 buy-in where 1st place was $10,000. Unfortunately, I finished 9th for $900, even though I entered the final table in 3rd place. With the lack of discipline necessary to make it through the higher levels of the online world, I was never able to make it to the big time and become the prodigy that others have.

When I was 18, I started playing live, attempting to fight my way through the treacherous $100 max buy-in. Despite my continuous lack of discipline and the restrictions present in live play, I was able to play my through college amassing over $20,000 in online tournament winnings. When July 2010 came along, I jumped at the opportunity. I earned $10,000 that July as players struggled to make the transition to real poker. In May 2011, I will be graduating from the University of South Florida with a degree in Finance and minor in Mathematics. After graduation, I plan on playing poker full-time as well as lend a hand to my parents with their restaurant. I plan on exceeding $100,000 in poker earnings for 2011.

I hope you enjoyed joining me on this poker journey. We started off with the progression of poker law in Florida, and extensively covered the July 2010 reform in the context of what it represents for Florida poker players. We learned plenty about analyzing stack sizes and how they affect the game of poker, as well as understanding the affect of the rake has on potential profits. We also took a look at

41 A freeroll is a tournament that costs nothing to enter where they payout a few dollars out to the few top finisher (in this case the top 18) out of thousands on entrants.
ways in which the July 2010 reform can potentially help the Florida economy. Finally, we wrapped everything up with a hand analysis that illustrates the skill necessary to consistently win at NLH poker. After reading this, I hope you can walk away knowing more about the game of poker than you knew previously. If so, my purpose has been served. Good luck and let all your hands be winners!

**Understanding the Session Tracker**

#: designates the order of hands I was dealt. A total of 179 hands were played for the session.

**Position**: designates the position I was in for the hand relative to the Dealer button.

The following are position designations for a 10-handed game.

**Early Position:**

SB = Small Blind: The first player to the left of the Dealer Button. Acts first every round but pre-flop

BB = Big Blind: The player directly to the left of the SB.

UTG = Under-the-gun: The first player to act pre-flop. Located directly to the left of the Big Blind.

+1 = Under-the-gun +1: The player directly to the left of UTG.

**Middle Position:**

+2 = Under-the-gun +2: The player directly to the left of UTG +1.

+3 = Under-the-gun +3: The player directly to the left of UTG +2.

+4 = Under-the-gun +4: The player directly to the left of UTG +3.

**Late Position:**
HJ = High-Jack: The position two players to the right of the Deal Button.

CO = Cut-off: The position directly to the right of the Dealer Button.

D = Dealer Button. The most coveted position on the felt.

S = Straddle. The player doubles the blind, and the Pre-flop action begins with the play directly to the left of the straddle. If the pot is not raised, the player who straddled is a given an option like the BB would normally receive

BS = Button Straddle. The player on the button straddles and play begins with the SB.

**Hand:**

T = Ten

J = Jack

Q = Queen

K = King

A = Ace

o = off-suit; exp. K8o

s = suited; exp JTs. Or, spade; JsTc

8d7c = 8-of-diamonds, 7-of-clubs

Rags = an unplayable hand; exp. J2o

x = a suit, that of which knowing is irrelevant to the hand.
Action:

* = check

# = call

^ = Pre-flop – raise; Post-flop - bet

^^ = Pre-flop – re-raise- Post-flop - raise

s = seat

' ' = denotes my action

** = everyone checks

'*.' = I check-fold

! = All-in

-- = everyone folds; pot is taken down and hand ends