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Introduction

Most serious small and medium stake poker players play the game decently well, but they have a few gigantic flaws in their strategy that make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to succeed in the long run. This book presents 100 essential tips you must master if you want to succeed at no-limit hold'em, especially as you move up to the higher stakes games where your opponents have almost no flaws in their strategies. If you master the 100 essential tips in this book, you will be well on your way to becoming a strong poker player who can thrive at almost any no-limit hold'em table. While you may already know many of the tips in this book, even the most studious players will be able to find a few ways to improve their skills. Some of the content in this book has appeared in my previous books, blog posts, and articles, but I am including it in this book because the content is vital to master if you want to succeed at no-limit hold'em.

Before we move forward, I want to make it clear that all you have to do to win at poker is find a game you can beat, play it a lot, and keep a proper bankroll. If you do these three things, you will win in the long run. If you do two out of the three, you may make it, but probably not. If you do one or none, you have no chance to succeed. Work hard and strive to put these 100 essential tips into practice every time you play and they will ensure you are consistently doing the three things required to win.

Let's get to it!

Jonathan Little, New York, September 2023

CHAPTER 16

PLAY WIDER RANGES WITH AN ANTE AND NO RAKE

When playing in a poker tournament, there will usually be an ante in play and no rake will be taken out of each individual pot (you pay the rake when you enter the tournament, not in each pot). This results in each pot starting with a decent amount of money in it. As the pot starts larger, you have to play wider ranges due to your increased pot odds.

For example, if everyone folds to you on the button playing 80bbs deep in a cash game with no ante and a normal rake, you should raise with about 42% of hands. In a tournament with a 1bb ante and no rake, you should raise with roughly 56% of hands (*Diagram 28*).

You can use logic to realize that if you happen to be playing in a tournament that has a smaller than 1bb ante, you should play a little tighter. While a 1bb ante is quite common in live poker, many online sites use an ante structure where each player at the table puts in some portion of a big blind, usually between 10% and 15% of a big blind per player. If you happen to be playing 5-handed with a 10% bb ante per player, the pot would be smaller than if there was a 1bb ante and therefore you should use slightly tighter ranges. If there are 10 players at the table with a 15% bb ante per player, you should use slightly wider ranges because the pot has 1.5bbs in it from the antes.

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Diagram 28:

- *Raise with no ante 41.8%*
- *Also raise with ante 13.9%* / ● *Fold 44.3%*

Simply put, as your pot odds get better and you can win more money when your opponents fold, you should play wider ranges.

CHAPTER 17

PLAY TIGHTER RANGES WITH NO ANTE AND A RAKE

When there is no ante and also a rake, the pots you are fighting for are somewhat small. This is usually the case in cash games where rake is taken from each pot, and the impact is quite large pertaining to which hands you can defend from the big blind.

Suppose the cutoff raises to 2.75bbs out of their 80bb stack and everyone folds to you in the big blind. With no ante and a rake, you can only defend with 29% of hands, whereas with a 1bb ante and no rake, you can defend with 74% of hands (*Diagram 29*).

It is also worth noting how small blind strategy changes when there is a rake and no ante. With no ante and a rake, when someone raises before you, you should only 3-bet or fold. You should not call with any hand from the small blind because you are not closing the action and a chunk of the pot will be raked away. You will also entice the big blind to call, resulting in you having the worst position in a 3-handed pot. By 3-betting, you win the pot before the flop some portion of the time (and thus pay no rake in most venues) and when you get called, you will usually be heads-up and the pot will be large such that the rake is more negligible (assuming the rake is capped).

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Diagram 29:

- *Defend with no ante 29.1%*
- *Also defend with ante 44.6% / ● Fold 26.2%*

As the rake becomes a larger percentage of the pot, you should further tighten your ranges because the pot you are fighting for is smaller. In games with an uncapped rake (which is the case in many private games), you should play extremely tightly. Despite this, you will witness many players in these games seeing every flop to try to make a strong hand. These players are close to guaranteed to lose because their money is being consistently raked away. The only way to beat a game with a large rake is to play an extremely tight strategy such that you rarely actually pay the rake and you win most of the pots you enter.

Simply put, as your pot odds get worse, you must play tighter ranges.

CHAPTER 18

PROPERLY COMBAT LIMPERS

When someone limps before the action gets to you, you have to decide how to respond. The main overriding factor in how you should proceed is if the initial limper is tricky or straightforward.

If the initial limper is tricky, meaning they will limp with some of the best hands looking to re-raise if someone raises, you should raise only or mostly with your absolute best hands plus some blockers to their premium hands that do not play too well in multi-way pots. Some limpers will be heavily weighted towards A-A whereas others will limp with A-A plus a wide range of marginal hands they think are not strong enough to make an initial raise. It is up to you to figure out each specific opponent's range composition.

Playing 75bbs deep against one tricky limper who you do not know especially well from early position, if you are also in early position, this is a reasonable strategy (*Diagram 30*).

This raising range may seem tight, but you have to remember that this type of player wants you to raise some portion of the time. If your opponent wants you to do something, you should not do it unless it is actually in your favor. If you expect someone yet to act to frequently raise (as some aggressive players will), you should call with a tighter range. When there is a player yet to act who you know with a high degree of certainty will raise over limps, strongly consider limping behind with your best hands, looking to put in a re-raise.

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Diagram 30:

- Raise for value 3.3% / ● Raise as a bluff 1.8%
- Call 16.1% / ● Fold 78.7%

If you are in a later position, you can call a bit wider with additional suited hands. Marginal offsuit hands that are not connected will rarely be playable, even for 1bb. From the small blind, you can call a bit wider with offsuit connected hands due to your better pot odds, but don't get too carried away against a tricky limper. From the blinds, raise with an extremely polarized range, and perhaps with only the best hands if you expect to completely lack preflop fold equity.

If you know the limper's range is heavily weighted towards A-A and K-K, you should raise with only A-A, maybe K-K, and perhaps a blocker hand like A-Jo as a bluff, opting to call and see the flop with all the other pairs (even as strong as Q-Q!) and suited hands that have excellent implied odds. Do not automatically assume that just because someone limps that they must have a marginal hand!

Against straightforward players who limp only or mostly with hands they think are not good enough to raise, you should raise far more often because most decently strong hands will crush your opponent's limp/calling range.

75bbs deep against one straightforward limper from early position,

when you are also in early position, here is a reasonable strategy (*Diagram 31*).

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Diagram 31:

● Raise for value 15.7% / ● Call 8.9% / ● Fold 75.4%

Against straightforward limpers, you should raise with a strong linear range, opting to limp behind with suited hands that play well enough post-flop. You should immediately realize that this limping range is quite marginal. If the opponents yet to act will frequently raise over limps (as they should against two marginal limping ranges), you should tighten up your limping range a bit, perhaps to the point that you raise with all playable hands in your range. If you limp behind, someone yet to act raises, and then the initial limper calls, all hands in the above limping range can call and see the flop as long as the raise is not too large.

From the later positions, you can raise with a wider range depending on how often you expect the straightforward limper to continue both preflop and postflop. Do not get too carried away raising limpers with all sorts of junk though, because unless they fold far too often, it will be difficult to profit with junky hands.

Against multiple limpers, the initial limper's strategy should be your main

concern. Most players who limp behind the initial limper almost never have a premium hand because they would have raised. If the initial limper is tricky, you should proceed with caution. If they are straightforward, you should proceed aggressively. As more limpers enter the pot, offsuit unconnected hands like K-8o and J-7o become especially terrible, so do not raise them and do not call with them even when getting excellent pot odds.

Against multiple limpers, be sure to raise a bit larger than the size of the pot to ensure you have fold equity. Many players make the mistake of raising over multiple limpers to something like 5bbs only to have all the limpers call. When someone has to put in 4bbs to win a 20bb pot, they should not fold too often. By raising far less than the size of the pot, you essentially force your opponents to play well, even with their marginal ranges. You make money when your opponents make mistakes, not when they play well.

Recall from the preflop raise chart earlier that if there are 4 limpers, make it roughly $3 \times 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + 1 + .5 = 7.5\text{bbs}$. If there is an ante in play or if you are out of position, raise a little larger. If you think your opponents will call a “normal” raise but will almost always fold to a “large” raise, experiment with making it “normal” when you want to get called (when you have a premium hand) and “large” when you do not want to get called (when you have a non-premium hand). If your opponents will always call a 7.5bb raise but will always fold to an 11bb raise, you have found an extremely profitable spot.

As stacks get shallower, you have to be especially careful raising limpers because they can shove all-in over your raise, forcing you to fold your non-premium hands. That said, most players who limp with shallow stacks have incredibly weak ranges, allowing you to raise and steal the pot a large portion of the time either preflop or with a postflop continuation bet.

CHAPTER 19

PLAY TIGHTER IN MULTI-WAY POTS

Many players incorrectly think they should loosen their ranges when someone raises and multiple players call because they are getting excellent pot odds. However, they fail to consider that they are far more likely to be dominated, resulting in them having a much more difficult time realizing their equity.

Suppose 80bbs deep in a tournament, the first player to act 8-handed raises and everyone folds to you in the big blind. Here is the GTO strategy (*Diagram 32*).

You should defend all suited hands and all the decent offsuit high cards, connectors, and one-gappers. Your 3-betting range contains the best hands plus some suited Aces and connectors.

Instead suppose UTG raises and the button and small blind call. Here is the GTO strategy from the big blind (*Diagram 33*).

Notice how much tighter you have to defend. The weakest suited hands become unplayable, as do almost all offsuit hands except Broadway hands and some connectors. Also, your 3-betting range becomes almost entirely linear.

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Diagram 32:

● Raise 12.5bb 5.7% / ● Call 52.8% / ● Fold 41.5%

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Diagram 33:

● Raise 12.5bb 8.0% / ● Call 29.8% / ● Fold 62.2%

This defending range is far tighter than most players use, which is why many players squander a ton of chips from the big blind in multi-way pots. While you can perhaps defend a little bit looser if you know the button and small blind are calling too loosely, you cannot get too out of line due to your complete lack of position and high likelihood of being against decently strong ranges that crush your weak hands.

Even from in position, you have to play a tighter range when there is a raise and a call before you. Here is the button strategy facing an UTG raise when 80bbs deep (*Diagram 34*).

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Diagram 34:

● 3-bet 5.5% / ● Call 17.6% / ● Fold 76.9%

Here is instead what you should do from the button if there is an UTG raise and a LJ call (*Diagram 35*).

Notice again how you have to call significantly tighter, especially with hands that are likely to be dominated. While I would probably not fold A-x's against most players, all the other seemingly playable hands like A-Jo, Q-Jo, and 10-8s should be folded. Just because you are getting excellent pot odds does not mean you should see the flop with all sorts of marginal hands.

AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AKo	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQo	KQo	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJo	KJo	QJo	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
ATo	KTo	QTo	JTo	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9o	K9o	Q9o	J9o	T9o	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8o	K8o	Q8o	J8o	T8o	98o	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7o	K7o	Q7o	J7o	T7o	97o	87o	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6o	K6o	Q6o	J6o	T6o	96o	86o	76o	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5o	K5o	Q5o	J5o	T5o	95o	85o	75o	65o	55	54s	53s	52s
A4o	K4o	Q4o	J4o	T4o	94o	84o	74o	64o	54o	44	43s	42s
A3o	K3o	Q3o	J3o	T3o	93o	83o	73o	63o	53o	43o	33	32s
A2o	K2o	Q2o	J2o	T2o	92o	82o	72o	62o	52o	42o	32o	22

Diagram 35:

● 3-bet 6.7% / ● Call 9.3% / ● Fold 84.1%