

to outplay your opponents. I will illustrate this by showing you the stats of a couple of real NL100 players, along with hands that I played against them.

Player 1: 1.8K hands, VPIP/PFR/3-bet: 23/19/9

UO PFR: 16/16/32/53/47

AFq: 42/38/29

Fv3-bet/4-bet/Fv4-bet: 53/16/67

C-bet/FvC-bet: 58/40

WTSD/W\$SD/WWSF: 29/46/47

Let's make a short description of this player based on these stats. His VPIP/PFR ratio seems to be that of a good player, within the average area. His 3-bet is rather high but nothing extraordinary. He doesn't seem very positionally aware, since he plays EP and MP the same, his CO range is wider than average, his BU range is normal but SB UO PFR% is very high (47%). His AFq is above average, so we can assume this player is likely to bet a lot, especially when he has the initiative. He c-bets slightly less frequently than average and folds a normal amount when facing c-bets. Finally, let's look at his showdown statistics. He goes to showdown quite often and, coupled with the fact that his W\$SD is less than 50%, we can confidently say he gets to showdown with a weaker than optimal range, either because he bets too often and gets looked up or because he calls too light.

Now let's see how we can use this knowledge to our advantage. We hold A♣-A♦ UTG 100bb deep, and open to 3bb. MP folds, our Villain is in CO, and 3-bets to 9bb. Everyone else folds. Based on his stats, we can either 4-bet or call. Since he 3-bets so often but folds to 4-bets reasonably often, based on what we know, I think calling is better with a wider than average, yet very strong range, so I call with A-A as well. The assumption here is that he won't make a big mistake, if any, if we 4-bet, but he will bet too often postflop or call more bets.

JB: I thought you said calling 3-bets OOP was bad?

EC: Here's what I said: 'In order to call you need to know not only the frequency at which he 3-bets, but also what hands he uses to get that frequency.' As you can see, I have a reasonable idea of what my current opponent is doing. Furthermore, if you get 3-bet a lot when OOP and don't feel comfortable calling with A-Q, K-Q, J-J and all those hands that look medium strength, you can add the premium hands as well. 4-betting premium hands is only great if your opponent makes big mistakes, such as calling weak or shoving way too light. I believe this particular player is unlikely to do this.

The flop is K♥-6♥-J♠, and we check. It's a flop he will c-bet more than his average in a 3-bet pot, since he will continue representing A-K, A-A, K-K, J-J, etc, and if we lead we don't get value or bluff him off anything that beats us or has great equity. As expected, he c-bets 12bb into a 19.5bb pot. This board is obviously not great for us. K-K, J-J and K-J now beat us, and they are all in his 3-betting range. We beat A-K, K-Q, Q-Q, A-J, Q-J type hands, but not all of these c-bet. That said, he will c-bet close to 100% of his air here. Since a raise will usually get called by the best hands in his range and air will fold, we should call. This way we also let him bluff into us on later streets, and his AFq is higher than average on each street.

The turn is 2♦, which makes the board K♥-6♥-J♠-2♦. This is a blank (it doesn't change the hands that we beat or that have us beat), so we follow through with our preflop and flop plan and check again. As expected, Villain bets again, this time 22bb into a 43.5bb pot, which leaves him about 60bb into an 85bb pot if we call. This usually means he is preparing to shove the river. Our plan seems to be working, so we call again. The river is a great card for us – the 2♠. This helps us, since we now beat K-J and no hands in his range improved. If we bet, we probably get called by A-K, K-Q, K-J, J-J, K-K and A-A, but those hands will very likely bet themselves anyway. By checking we let him fire that last desperate bullet. Indeed, we check, he shoves, we snap call, are shown 10♠-7♠ and win a 200bb pot.

Let's change our opponent's stats and assume that he 3-bets only around 4% from CO. In this case, we almost never 4-bet bluff against him. Why? He is unlikely to be bluffing when he 3-bets, so he will usually have hands he

wants to stack off with. In this case, not 4-betting A-A is bad. What happens when we 4-bet? He calls or shoves when we have the nuts and lots of money goes into the pot. What happens if we call? He stacks off with a strong range on favourable boards for him. That means he stacks off if he improves, or if his hand hasn't drastically decreased in value. In other words, he is scared too often by an A, K or Q on the flop when he has hands like K-K, Q-Q, J-J, A-K. K-K doesn't stack off on A high flops and has doubts even when it's only Q high. Q-Q is weak on K- or A-high boards. J-J is weak on A-, K- and Q-high boards. A-K doesn't stack off if it doesn't hit top pair or better. These hands make up too much of his 3-betting range for us to risk not getting his stack when we have the nuts and he is very unlikely to be 3-betting as a bluff.

Player 2: 5.1K hands, VPIP/PFR/3-bet = 29/16/9

UO PFR: 23/21/32/21/18

AFq: 40/29/29

Fv3-bet/4-bet/Fv4-bet: 22/11/67

C-bet/FvC-bet: 74/23

WTSD/W\$SD/WWSF: 38/47/39

Player two's VPIP/PFR ratio seems a bit unorthodox; the gap is too wide. This is not a big issue, but we can assume that he calls a lot more than the average opponent. His 3-bet percentage is high, just like player one. He also lacks positional awareness preflop, even more so than Player 1. He plays a wider range in early positions than on the button and is probably too tight in SB, but that's the least of his preflop leaks. Postflop, I'd say his AFq is within an average range. His C-bet% is quite high and Fold to C-bet is extremely low. Last, but most definitely not least, his showdown stats are very bad. Because of his incorrect approach to preflop hand selection, in particular, not being positionally aware, he ends up calling too much and not winning even close to the 50% needed at showdown. This means we should probably value bet very thinly against this opponent since he is a non-believer and likes to get to showdown.

We hold A♣-K♥ in MP with 100bb and open to 3bb. Everyone folds to Villain in BB who calls. The flop is K♦-6♥-3♥ and he checks. Based on his calling tendencies, we should look to value bet three streets unless he shows aggression somewhere. His VPIP is only slightly above average and his AFq is not out of line, so it's unlikely that he bluff raises with a high frequency.⁵

The turn is 3♣, which makes the board K♦-6♥-3♥-3♣. This is very good, as he is unlikely to have a low hand like 3-x in his range. A 6 on the turn would be worse than a 3. He is also less likely to have a set that just called on the flop, because there are now only five combos of sets, and with K-K he would almost certainly 3-bet preflop. We lose to 6-6 (3 combinations), and that's about it. He checks to us again and we make a clear value bet of 9bb bet into a 14.5bb pot. He calls. Our sizing here should be bigger. 11bb would probably get called by the same range, and we get a lot more value since we will bet the river extremely often.

On the river the board becomes K♦-6♥-3♥-3♣-J♦. This card is not the best for us, since he could have J-J or K-J, which beat us now. Having said that, he now has an easier call with his other K-x hands, as he improved his kicker, and he could still have J-x with a flush draw, with which he is very likely to call given his WTSD stat. We bet 21.5bb into the 32.5bb pot. This sizing is good, but with a bigger turn bet we could have bet even more on the river and kept the same ratio between the pot and our bet, giving him the same odds for more money. He tanks for a few seconds and calls with 9♦-6♦. This is a very weak hand, which confirms that he is very prone to go to showdown too often. We should not bluff this player. Instead we should value bet our mediocre hands too, since he calls with a lot worse.

How would we play this hand if our opponent was not so call happy? Let's imagine he only goes to showdown 21% of the time, which is a huge difference. If he also wins 55% at showdown, it will be hard to get called by worse if we bet the river. Of course, our hand has an immense amount of showdown value. Without a very good understanding of our opponent's

⁵ In contrast, when somebody plays a very wide range preflop and has the same AFq post-flop as someone who plays tight, he has more combos of bluffs, since a wide preflop range is less likely to make strong hands postflop.

range construction, and unless we are playing against someone likely to bluff raise in a spot like this, I think we should check back our top pair, top kicker on the river. We won't get called by anything worse and won't bluff him off anything. We could bet if we could get raised by worse, but this almost never happens at small stakes.

I hope these two hands have given you a grasp of how to characterize a player using the stats you have on him and how to exploit any large deviation from the average numbers. I can't stress enough that *these are just guidelines*, not a set of rules that you should follow blindly. Some players have unusual stats but can still be quite successful. *Take the extra information these stats give you and use it, but always be sure to adjust if the stats are proven wrong by other actions and other factors like table dynamics.*

Exercise: Try to profile yourself based on your stats, just like I did against my opponents. How would you exploit your own weaknesses?

JB Tries To Play Some Better Poker (NL10)

I don't know where I'm going, but I'm on my way. – Carl Sandburg

TT: After my initial appraisal of his game, JB and I had our first live coaching session, in which I sweated his play on four tables of NL10 after he had played on his own for four weeks and tried to absorb the basic information that we discussed above.

He was positionally aware, playing tighter UTG and in the blinds, looser in the CO and on the BU. His preflop starting hand selection was very accurate. However, while I was watching him play I realized that he was taking most actions pretty automatically. The only good thing about this is that it shows the level of confidence he has in his game and his ability to apply his newly developed skills at the table. The big problem is that every single decision point in every single hand is different.

Let's consider one particular hand that he played. JB open raised A♥-10♠ from the CO and BB called. He c-bet on a flop of A♦-A♣-5♠. Generally speaking, this is a solid idea, and definitely +EV. However, every decision