

Alex Fitzgerald



Alexander Fitzgerald is a professional poker player who has been in the industry for over a decade. After leaving home during high school, Alex worked as a commercial fisherman and security guard, until he found success playing Texas Hold'em.

While describing himself as having average intelligence, Alex has been able to accrue more than \$3,500,000 in tournament earnings around the world. This includes final-tabling WPT (World Poker Tour), EPT (European Poker Tour) and multiple WCOOP (World Championship of Online Poker) events.

In addition to his extraordinary success as a player, Alex also runs a poker consultancy that serves more than 1,000 poker players in 60 countries.

Constantly at work, Alex has published hundreds of training videos, articles and webinars. He is regarded by many as one of the most important tournament coaches in the world.

Other Books by Alex Fitzgerald

The Myth of Poker Talent

The Myth of Poker Talent is a comprehensive guide to both playing poker and being a poker player. While online MTT players may benefit the most from Fitzgerald's insights, the book is applicable to all variants of no-limit hold'em (tournaments or cash games), live or online. Just be ready to put in the effort.

Ben Saxton, PokerNews.com

... this is the best poker book I have ever read. And I really don't even think it's close.

Keith Woernle, PartTimePoker.com

Exploitative Play in Live Poker

I am pretty sure I have said before that a book I was reviewing at the time changed my life, but this time it didn't just change my life, it completely 100% altered my entire poker existence... I don't know about you, but I am never going to be satisfied with where my poker game is. I must admit I don't know what I don't know. I have to go out there and find the answers to the questions I don't even know that I have. I don't want to just grab any old book from any old shelf and learn any old information. I want to learn the best from the best. I am telling you: Alex Fitzgerald is the best of the best.

Shannon Mack, CardPlayerLifestyle.com

First of all, the book was fantastic: a read that I could not stop reading, gluing me to the pages. I'm not sure if it was the way the writer spoke or worded things or just perhaps the no-bullshit way to dominate a poker table that kept me wanting more and more.

ProfessionalRakeback.com

The 100 Biggest Mistakes that Poker Players Make

The book comes across like a well-honed classic rock album – every song is in the right place and if listened to in the order it was designed in, will have you singing throughout.

Paul Seaton, CardplayerLifestyle.com

I have yet to find a single piece of content by Alex that does not offer something profound or helpful to my game or my life. This book is no different. Section after section hits home in a way only poker players can understand. A+ work, once again.

Mike Wasserman, former #1 ranked player on Pocketfives

Alexander Fitzgerald is easily one of the top five poker coaches working in the world today. His crafty solutions for complex problems are easy for normal people to understand. You can tell this is a guy who wasn't blessed with poker talent at birth. He fought and clawed for every dollar he ever made. What he's learned through all of his years in the trenches is fascinating and illuminating.

Steve Blay, AdvancedPokerTraining.com

— ALEXANDER FITZGERALD —

HOW TO **BEAT** PLAYERS WHO **NEVER** **FOLD**

Succeeding in casino poker tournaments
and low stakes home games



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Introduction

Why People Never Fold

“These people never fold anything!” my student yells at me.

I’ve heard this a thousand times.

I’ve always been able to pay my bills through poker, but that’s not my sole career. My main job for over a decade has been poker coaching. I do private lessons almost every single morning.

And in every poker lesson I hear the same thing:

“No one ever folds!”

Which always makes me respond with the same questions:

“Why does it bother you that no one ever folds?”

“Because,” my student says, “I wait for hours for a hand, but it doesn’t even matter. When I raise my Aces a donkey comes galloping along and makes two pair with their 7-4s. I can never win a pot. I’m just sitting there waiting to get rivered. There’s no point to the game.”

“Have you ever considered that you’re playing the game wrong?” I ask.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, what you’re doing isn’t working. It hasn’t been working for a while. So, clearly, this is not the way you should be playing.”

“Oh.”

"You see the same people with big stacks all the time, right?" I ask.

"Yes."

"Do you really think they're that much brighter than you?"

"No, not really."

"Exactly. They're normal people, but they're seeing reality on reality's terms. They're not forcing their view of poker on other people. They know how to ride the wave of chips more efficiently."

"What are they doing differently?"

"I'm glad you asked..."

When to Bluff Bet

Most of your bluff bets versus casual players will have to be big because most of these players do not want to fold.

You should pick on them when you know they don't have a huge hand. This sounds like a basic statement, but many people do not practice it.

When can you be reasonably sure your opponent doesn't have a large hand? What does that situation look like?

Let's discuss a common situation where you can bluff.

You raise on the button with $6♥-4♥$. Your opponent calls out of the big blind. Both of you are deep stacked. The board comes $8♠-5♦-3♦$. Your opponent checks to you. You continuation bet something small. Your opponent calls. The turn is an offsuit Jack. It is checked to you. What do you do? (*Diagram 2*)

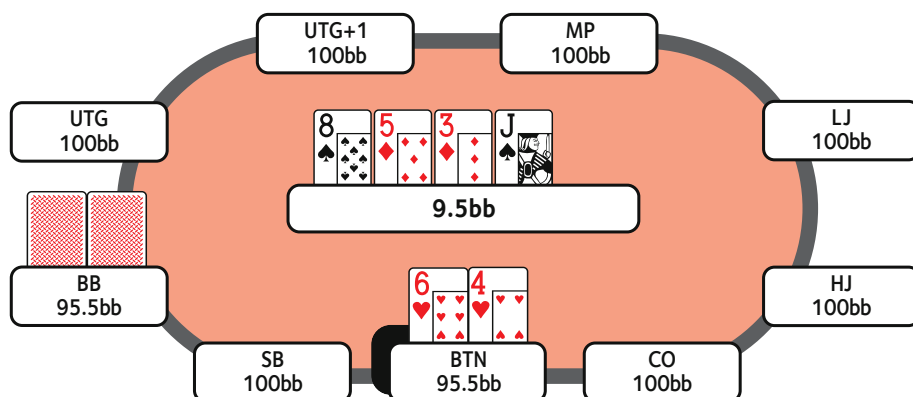


Diagram 2

You should heavily consider an overbet here. You don't have to bet massively, but 1.2x the pot should get the job done.

Your opponent just called on a coordinated board. Remember what we were talking about earlier? Your opponent likely would have check-raised on the flop with a set or two pair. They would have done this to simultaneously get money from their hand and protect it. Your opponent also would have likely three-bet preflop with overpairs. When they just call you on this coordinated board with flush draws and straight draws, it is likely they have a draw or a mediocre pair. None of those hands wanted to see that offsuit Jack on the turn. None of those hands wanted to see an overbet on the turn.

This is a fundamental example of "bluff them when they can't call." That

statement sounds simple on the surface, but it requires some application of nuance to execute properly.

Most of our bluff bets are going to be related to this play. We will find a spot where our opponents cannot have their best hands. They will not have their best hands because they just called preflop or because they just called or checked back on a coordinated board. Once we know our opponents can't have their best hands we will fire out at them. Because we know our opponents aren't in the business of folding, we will make our bluff bets as expensive as possible. Oftentimes, we will find the only bet they fold to is the one that puts them all-in. We will be willing to make that all-in bet.

When to Cash Out Your Equity

Almost all of our bets in No Limit Hold'em will be for value or for a bluff. If you're just learning how to play No Limit Hold'em, you should always try to make bets that have a purpose. Before you bet, you should always say to yourself, "I'm betting this hand for value because I expect these weaker hands to call _____" or "I'm betting this hand as a bluff because I expect these stronger hands to fold _____." If you can't fill out those sentences, it's a good indication that the bet is pointless and is being made because you're on autopilot.

The vast majority of your bets can be classified as bluff bets or value bets. However, on occasion, you will make a bet that doesn't get value from much, but it does have the nice side effect of ending the hand quickly. These bets allow you to cash out your equity and simplify your work.

A good example of this is when you raise from the button with 3-3. The big blind calls you. The board comes K-2-2 rainbow. It's checked to you.

Betting here is awkward, because you don't know what you're hoping for. It's not that likely you'll get worse hands to call you. He will call with some Ace highs but that's about it. He probably would have three-bet his best Ace highs. He isn't likely to call you with Queen-high. Your bet also won't fold out better hands. If he has 4-4 or 5-5 that he just called with preflop, he's likely to call a continuation bet.

However, what betting here does accomplish is that it makes the hand easier to play. If you check back and your opponent leads the turn, there's practically no card that is good for you. You will have a hard time guessing if he's bluffing or not. If you bet on the flop, you'll get hands like 10-9s with a

backdoor flush draw to fold. Those hands have a decent equity share of the pot, but they don't know that. If we get them to forfeit their equity, that's fine by us. We'll take the simplification of this hand as opposed to a dramatic call down without direction.

Value Betting is 90% of Your Job

I was talking with a student of mine the other day. He had one of the best databases of hands I'd seen in a long time. However, he wasn't making the kind of money he wanted to make in No Limit Hold'em.

I couldn't figure out what he was doing wrong. Everything I pulled up on his database looked excellent. Then, it jumped out at me.

When he had one pair, he was constantly pot controlling. He was so good at not making mistakes and not being exploited that he forgot to exploit others. He wasn't getting out of line when his opponents were incapable of large postflop bluffs. He wasn't value betting thinly and scoring huge pots.

Once I pointed this out to him he started value betting more thinly in goofier spots. He had to become exploitable to exploit others, but that didn't matter. He reported to me days later that he'd final tabled three huge tournaments since we spoke. All he needed to unlock his game was a taste for value betting.

What people don't realize is that when they're trying to open trash hands from any position they're only making shreds of a big blind. However, if you score a value bet that others are not getting, that's 20 or 40 or 60 big blinds that other people are not finding.

We are always trying to land the knockout punch when we play No Limit Hold'em. If we're not looking to land the bomb, we'll never land it. Keep your eyes open. You're not truly playing until you get a guy to crumble emotionally from calling three streets versus your top pair second kicker.

Buying Showdowns

There is another play that we should discuss in this section. This play is referred to as buying the showdown.

Imagine you have A♥-9♥. You are deep stacked. You raise on the button. The big blind, who is also deep stacked, calls you. The board comes J♦-9♦-4♣. It is checked to you. You continuation bet. Your opponent calls. The turn is a 5♣. It's checked to you (*Diagram 3*).

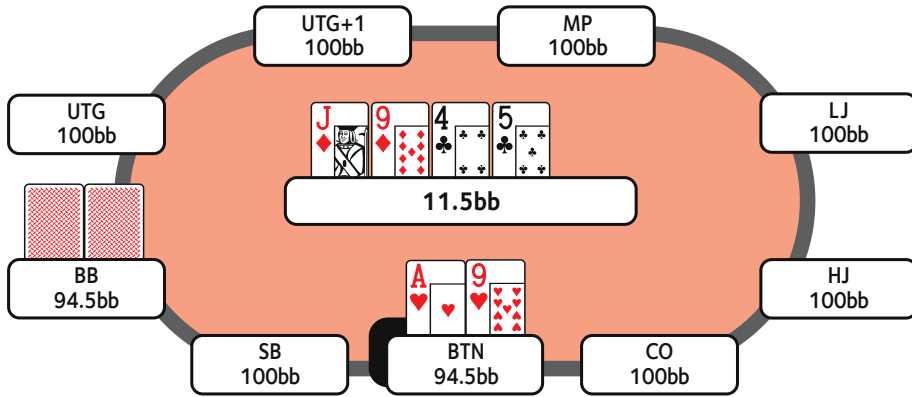


Diagram 3

Versus opponents who never fold, you want to bet here. You'll still get value from straight draws and flush draws. You will get value from inferior nines.

People don't like betting here because they don't know what to do if their opponent raises them. However, they shouldn't fear this play because it only happens a small percentage of the time.

People also don't like betting here because they sometimes value bet the second best hand. It's still entirely possible that their opponent has a Jack here.

However, checking back has its own dangers. Any diamond, King, Queen, or Ten will make calling a river bet more difficult. If our opponent fires out a large river bet we will be lost. If we can buy the showdown with a thin value bet on the turn, we should do that instead.

Neither option is perfect. You only have mediocre choices in this situation. Yet, versus loose competition who never fold and love doing thin call downs, it's preferable to value bet thinly. It simplifies our work and also gets us thinner value, which is the entire point of the game.

The Draw Missed? They're Not Folding

Let's look at a different hypothetical situation while we're in this section.

You open from the lojack with 7-7. Your opponent in the hijack calls. All the other players fold. You both are deep stacked to start the hand.

The board comes K♠-7♠-2♥. You continuation bet. Your opponent, a loose player who never wants to fold anything, calls you. The turn is the 2♣. It's on you. What do you do? Do you bet again? Do you bet a large amount? Do you bet a small amount? What is your normal play in this situation? (Diagram 4)

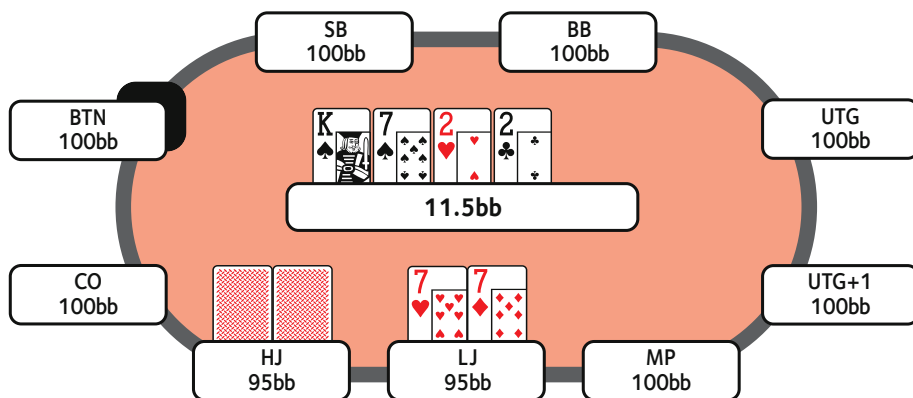


Diagram 4

Let's imagine you have absolutely nothing on this turn instead. You have 6♣-5♣. You beat nothing. What do you do in this situation? Do you think a large bet will get your opponent to fold? Do you think a small bet will get them to fold?

What you should do with your full house in the first example is consider an overbet. If your opponent truly never folds then you should be overbetting often. The flush draw missed and it's unlikely you have a two. If they have a King, they're going to have a hard time folding. They're likely to do some one-factor analysis that will allow them to keep calling down, since truly that's what they want to do anyway. "I bet he has a flush draw" will become their rallying cry.

Remember when we discussed the mentality of these players earlier? Once they make a pair, especially a top pair, they're not in the business of folding. If they can justify their call with "I put him on a missed draw" then they will use that excuse.

"A man has two reasons for doing something; a good reason and the real reason" – J.P. Morgan.

If your opponent floated you with a high card, it was unlikely you were going to get another bet anyway. If they have some pocket pair smaller than the King, they're going to have a hard time folding as well. They'll wonder why you're betting so big if you have a King. "Your line just doesn't make sense," they'll say after they call down.

If you believe you won't get value from this bet, then another question must be asked. If your opponent is truly going to fold Kings here to this overbet then do you overbet when you have the 6-high?

You can't have it both ways. It's not possible you'll get no action when you overbet your huge hand but also simultaneously true that overbetting as a bluff is a bad idea. It's usually going to be one or the other.

If you don't want to do an overbet in this spot, that's fine. But you should bet larger. If you bet half the pot or 80% of the pot you'll be called, so go ahead and use the larger number.

Why They Can't Fold on Rivers

I have spent much of my life wondering why people can't fold on rivers.

I didn't make it as a poker pro because I had talent. I was a slow learner. The only reason I made it was because I didn't have the option of losing. I had to win or I was going back to commercial fishing and security jobs. I didn't want to do that kind of work again. When I was facing a bet on the river, I sweated the decision due to my living situation. That added pressure helped me play better. If I had the money to play around with, I doubt I would have ever developed discipline at the table.

People forget how much patience is involved in poker, especially when it comes to the live arena. Imagine how hard it would be to sit in a chair in a casino and do nothing for four hours. Think of how bored you would get doing nothing while all the chips shuffled around you.

When you play live poker, you can easily fold for three hours and fifty minutes out of four hours if you're running poorly. You will want to go crazy sitting there while doing nothing. If you get a dopamine hit from firing the chips in, it will feel like torture to watch everyone else get to play while you don't get to do anything.

If you're running poorly and bored to the point of insanity, it will be easy to start seeing things. You'll start suspecting that these people don't actually have good hands at all. Maybe they're just bluffing you constantly. "They can't have it every time!" you think.

And that's when it happens. You're on the river. They bet large. You liked your hand. It's been a long time since you had a hand this good. You're so exhausted. You want to call. If you call, you finally get to see what all these people are actually playing. Maybe it's trash.

That temptation is hard to resist. Especially if you've been sitting around going nuts for hours and hours.

You can't blame people for calling too much on the river. If they fold, they consent to a larger loss. They've already invested a serious amount of chips.

If they gamble and call off, they still could snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. A huge pot being shoved their way will feel like euphoria. If they have the money to gamble with, the call will always be super tempting.

That's why they crack. That's why everyone cracks.

Overbet Even More

Because people struggle to fold rivers, we should seek to exploit this vulnerability.

If your opponent is likely to have a top pair, then you should blast the river more. People become attached to top pair. It is hard to make top pair. When they have been waiting around for hours and finally hit top pair, they do not want to fold the hand. You must capitalize on this.

You don't have to bet six times the pot, but you can bet a hair over the size of the pot. They will be surprised by the size of the bet, but then they will use your sizing as justification. "Why so much?" they will ask.

If they fold a top pair and show you, fine. We have learned something. We aren't in a game where people never fold. This is another monster opportunity.

However, most of the time when you play with 100BB or less, you will see people struggle to fold pairs. You must take advantage of this.

Quick Calls on Coordinated Boards

Let's imagine this scenario.

You raise from early position. You have A-Qo. You have 100BB and so does everyone else at the table. The lojack calls you. The hijack calls you. The button calls you. The big blind calls you. You have a multiway pot. Once again, no one wants to fold.

The board comes Q♠-5♦-7♦. You do not have a diamond in your hand. It's checked to you. You bet half of the pot. It's folded to the button. He calls quickly. The big blind folds. You and this player are heads-up.

The turn is the 9♣. It's on you. Should you fire again? (*Diagram 5*)

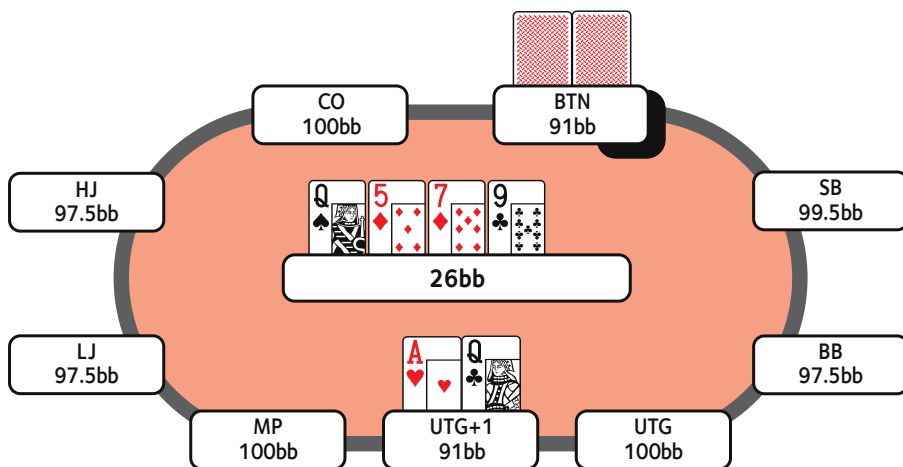


Diagram 5

Your opponent has given you valuable information on this hand. When he called quickly on this coordinated flop, he revealed something. If he had flopped a set of sevens or fives on this board, he would have had to think through his action. If he raises on this flop, he could accidentally shut down the action. That's not preferable when you have a monster. If he calls on the flop, he risks letting a flush draw or straight draw catch up. This could leave him losing a big pot with an expensive second-best hand.

Due to the conundrum he's in with a set, most players will take their time to decide what they want to do. They will think through a trap or fast playing. They usually will not call quickly.

Additionally, if he did flop a set, there's a good chance he would subject you to some acting. "Oh golly gee, what do I do here? I'm so confused about my hand because it's not that good. I sure hope you don't fire again on the turn!" You see recreational players do this all the time. They will call quickly with a mediocre pair hoping that makes them look more confident. It's almost like they're trying to send you the signal, "please stop betting!" However, if they flop a set they sit there and take a ton of time. They are implying that they don't know what to do.

If someone calls you quickly on this board, it's likely they have a hand that doesn't require much thought. They may have a flush draw, a seven, 8-8, Q-10, or something similar. Their most likely hand is a mediocre pair or a draw. Pairs and draws do not need to think about raising because raising is often a bad idea

If you bet 70% or 80% of the pot, it will look like you are betting with a draw. You will get called by inferior Queens, J-J, 10-10, 9-9, and eights often.

If the button is the only one who calls you, then you shouldn't fear a spade on the river. You should fire a small value bet again.

You shouldn't fear the spade on the river because it's likely your button opponent would have bet on the flop with any spade draws. That is a hand that many people prefer to semibluff with.

Quick Raises on Dry Boards

Let's discuss a situation that is more confusing in No Limit Hold'em.

You have J-9s on the button. UTG limps, but he's a super passive and loose player. Hijack limps and cutoff limps. You raise to 9BB, because you know exploiting wide ranges when you're in position is the ticket to making real money.

The big blind calls you. He's a nice enough guy in his 40s, but he seems tense. Surprisingly, all the limpers fold.

The board comes Q-5-2 rainbow. He checks to you. You bet 10BB into the pot. Both you and he are 100BB deep.

He looks at the bet and immediately throws out 23BB. The action is back on you. What should you do?

You should be suspicious of this raise. Think about it. If he had Queens, wouldn't he have three-bet preflop? If he has a set of fives or twos, why is he raising on this board? It's unlikely you've hit much on this hit-or-miss board. You have a queen on this board or you have nothing. Why would he raise with a set if he knows you have nothing most of the time?

If he had a queen, wouldn't he just call for the same reasons? He knows he most likely has the best hand now, but if he raises he isn't getting value from much.

What this raise often signifies is a pair that's trying to find out where it's at. It's Jacks, tens, nines, or eights that want to find out if they're good right now. Additionally, sometimes this is frustration: "You can't have anything on this board. Why do you think I'll fold to a simple continuation bet? I'm going to steal this pot right now."

You should consider raising again in this situation. I've found if I do the raise immediately it truly stuns a number of players. They're used to this raise getting puzzled glances and occasional calls. They're not used to someone whip-

ping out more chips immediately.

On occasion, you will run into a player who raises a set on this board to get the party started. They do not have many combinations of sets, but it does happen. When you run into a set, they will usually jam over your raise hoping you're ready to go broke with a Queen. When you fold in this situation, don't be shocked if you hear some chortling and whispering. It feels like high school sometimes.

In much of the world, bluffing is seen as a fun part of the game. People will clap you on the back and love the passion you're bringing to the table. For some reason, in North America, big bluffs that fail are often derided. You'll have to be prepared for this.

It's free pizza for the other players. They get a dopamine hit when they see someone attempt a bluff that fails. "I would never do that," they say to themselves, which makes them feel superior.

Now, let's rework this situation and change some factors.

You have J-9s on the button. UTG limps, but he's a super passive and loose player. Hijack limps and cutoff limps. You raise to 9BB. The big blind calls you. He's a nice enough guy in his 40s, but he seems tense. Surprisingly, all the limpers fold.

The board comes Q♥-5♥-2♠. He checks to you. You bet 10BB into the pot. Both you and he are 100BB deep.

He looks at the bet and immediately throws out 23BB. The action is back on you. What should you do? (*Diagram 7*)

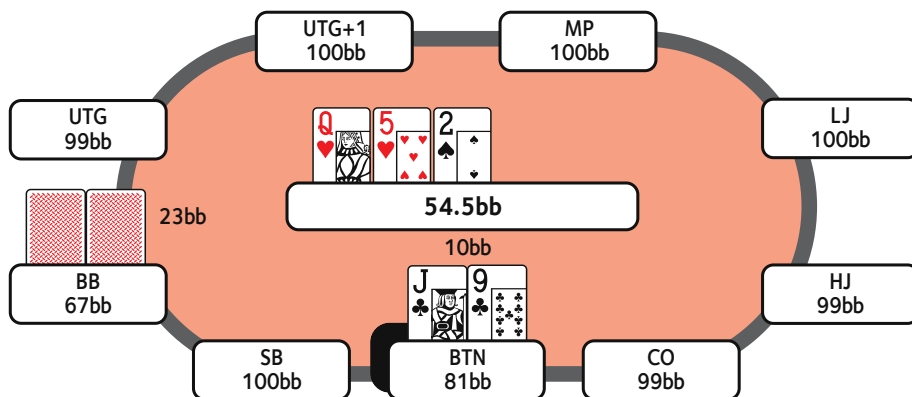


Diagram 7

In this situation, you should fold almost always. Many players fear the flush draw coming in. They will play their top pairs and sets fast in hopes of protecting their hand from a flush draw. Since your opponent has more value combinations in their raising range, you don't need to bother. You can let this hand go.

Let's try another situation.

You have J-9s on the button. UTG limps, but he's a super passive and loose player. Hijack limps and cutoff limps. You raise to 9BB, because you know exploiting wide ranges when you're in position is the ticket to making real money.

The big blind calls you. He's a nice enough guy in his 40s, but he seems tense. UTG calls as well. Hijack and cutoff fold.

The board comes Q-5-2 rainbow. It's checked to you. You bet 10BB into the pot. Everybody is 100BB deep in the hand.

The big blind player looks at your bet and quickly makes it 23BB. The UTG player folds. It's on you. What should you do?

You should fold. In multiway pots, people will fastplay sets more often because they assume someone else has something and they're going to get paid. To be fair, in multiway pots it is far more likely you will run into a hand, so they have a point. You'll even see some players raise A-Qo on this board to see if they can get called by weaker pairs.

Since your opponent has more value combinations, you should fold.

How to Make Big Calls

Everyone wants to make a huge call at a poker table. It's the greatest feeling in the world to catch a bluff. Calling down correctly with one pair when another person shoved all their chips feels amazing.

However, most of the time hero calling is not recommended. Why? Your opponents call too much. They don't take the initiative. They're unlikely to be bluffing enough of the time to justify making thin calls.

There are rare occasions where hero calling is advisable. Let's discuss them in this section.

Does He Do This With X?

Imagine you have A-Qo on the button. UTG and UTG2 limp. Lojack limps. You raise to 9BB on the button. The blinds fold. UTG folds. UTG2 calls you and so does lojack. You all have 100BB to start the hand.

The board comes 6♥-3♥-2♠. The players check to you. You have the A♥ in your hand. You check back because you likely have the best hand right now, but it's unlikely that you will get anyone to pay you off with a worse hand. Additionally, if the turn comes with a heart, that helps your hand.

You check. The turn is the Q♠. Both players check to you again. You bet 10BB. UTG calls. UTG2 folds.

The river is the 8♦. UTG checks to you. You bet 20BB. Immediately, UTG moves all-in for 61BB more. What do you want to do? (*Diagram 8*)

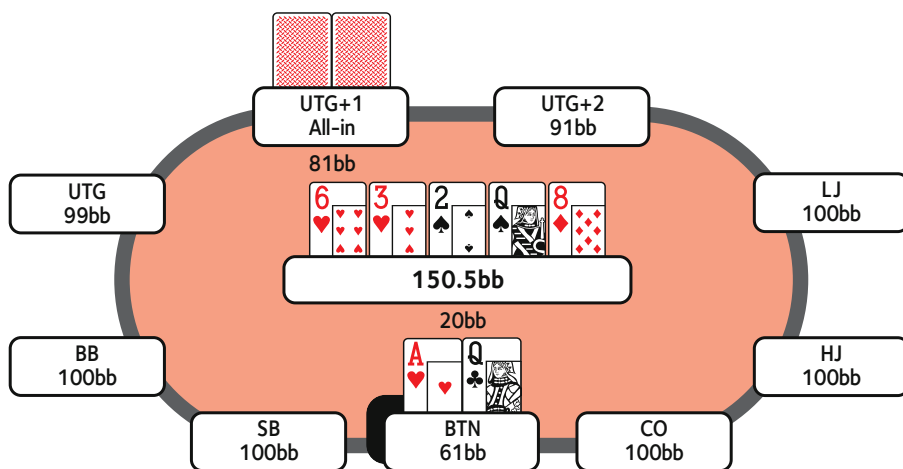


Diagram 8

What most people do here is freak out. The pressure of the game gets to them and their mind starts racing.

If this happens to you, don't worry. It happens to almost everyone when they start out. What we need to do in this situation is get our brain to stop racing. How do we do that?

We ask ourselves some questions that anchor us. The first question we should ask ourselves in this situation is, "does he do this with X?" X in this situation is the best hand that you beat.

X on the board of 6♥-3♥-2♠-Q♠-8♦ versus our A-Q is K-Qo. The best hand that he could have that we beat is K-Qo. Does that seem like a likely hand for him to move all-in with?

Most people would just call with that hand. Obviously, there are some people who think top pair is the nuts, but they're a rarity.

Notice how much clearer this situation is becoming because we asked our-

selves that one question?

Now, what other question should we ask ourselves in this situation?

Does He Do This With a Missed Draw?

We have A-Qo on a 6♥-3♥-2♠-Q♠-8♦ board. We checked the flop, bet 10BB on the turn, and bet 20BB on the river. Our opponent moved all-in on us immediately on the river for 61BB more. We're stuck.

We have asked ourselves, "does he do this with X?" X is the best hand we beat. X in this situation is K-Q. K-Q seems unlikely. Many of our opponents would just call with that hand.

The second question we should ask ourselves is, "does our opponent do this bet with a missed draw?"

Most bluffs are missed draws. People have a ton of equity and they're excited. When they miss all of their outs they get pissed off. They decide to try and snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

We have to work through this hand and ask ourselves if a draw makes sense. If he has a number of draws, we should consider calling.

In this hand, we have a problem. Our opponent was first to act on the turn. They easily could have bet with their spade draws and heart draws, but instead they chose to check.

Many people would have led with their draws on that turn as a semibluff.

Since he checked, we have to discount some of the missed flush draws. Additionally, we are blocking some of the heart draws. This all makes calling on the river less advisable..

Does He Do This With a Pair He Turned Into a Bluff?

We have A-Qo on a 6♥-3♥-2♠-Q♠-8♦ board. We checked the flop, bet 10BB on the turn, and bet 20BB on the river. Our opponent moved all-in on us immediately on the river for 61BB more. We're stuck.

We have asked ourselves, "does he do this with X?" X is the best hand we beat. X in this situation is K-Q. K-Q seems unlikely. Many of our opponents would just call with that hand.

The second question we should ask ourselves is, "does our opponent do this bet with a missed draw?" We have discounted that option because our opponent did not lead on the turn.

The third question we should ask ourselves is, “does our opponent turn a pair into a bluff on this river?”

Imagine our opponent has 6-7s preflop. They liked the flop. They didn’t like the turn. They really didn’t like it when you bet the river. Now, they might believe their hand is no longer good, but they still don’t want to fold. So, they decide to shoot for the moon and fire a huge bluff bet in.

Turning a pair into a bluff is a rare play. Some advanced players will occasionally do it when they want to represent a slowplayed set. They will do this when they believe you are value betting too thinly.

Turning a pair into a bluff is an extremely difficult play to pull off. Most poker players don’t want to look stupid, so they won’t bluff raise a river. You shouldn’t believe a person is turning a pair into a bluff unless you’ve seen them do it before.

On occasion, a recreational player will simply get pissed off that their hand is no longer good. They’ll shove on the river to see what happens.

This happens rarely and is difficult to predict. If you do not have a physical read to use, you should not put your opponent on a frustrated pair.

We will discuss physical tells later.

Does He Do This With a High Card?

We have A-Qo on a 6♥-3♥-2♠-Q♠-8♦ board. We checked the flop, bet 10BB on the turn, and bet 20BB on the river. Our opponent moved all-in on us immediately on the river for 61BB more. We’re stuck.

We have asked ourselves, “does he do this with X?” X is the best hand we beat. X in this situation is K-Q. K-Q seems unlikely. Many of our opponents would just call with that hand.

The second question we should ask ourselves is, “does our opponent do this bet with a missed draw?” We have discounted that option because our opponent did not lead on the turn.

The third question we should ask ourselves is, “does our opponent turn a pair into a bluff on this river?” If we haven’t seen our opponent do this before, we should discount this option. It’s an unlikely play for our opponent to run.

The fourth question we should ask ourselves is, “does our opponent do this with a high card?”

Does our opponent ever just fall in love with their A-K and not want to fold

it? Did they get mad that their A-K missed yet again and now they're trying to bluff and win the pot?

This does happen on occasion. We see nit-maniacs do this sometimes.

However, again, this is a rare play. If we haven't seen our opponent do this kind of bluff before, we shouldn't believe they are capable of it.

We Don't Need to Know His Hand

Nine times out of ten when we run through this checklist we will discover we should fold. Our opponent isn't betting anything worse and there's not many missed draws they could have. We've never seen them do a more exotic bluff so we don't give them credit for ramming and jamming with one weak pair or a high card. The end. There's nothing more to discuss.

You don't need to go beyond this checklist often because it is unlikely your opponents are bluffing enough to make you concerned. The vast majority of your opponents see most poker decisions as binary. "Do I call or a do I fold?" They're purely looking down at their hand and asking themselves if it is worth anything. They have a hard time picturing other ranges. They have a hard time running bluffs because they feel stupid when their bluffs fail.

Notice how this checklist doesn't require us to figure out what our opponent has. It doesn't matter what better hand our opponent has. All that matters is that he does have a better hand.

When you hear people saying to themselves, "nothing makes sense, I have to call", that's usually a rationalization. Normally, when you can't put your opponent on a hand, that means they slowplayed something. They usually have a value hand because, again, most people struggle to bluff enough once the pot gets big. They might three-bet squeeze on occasion or fire a double barrel, but it's hard to find people who can bluff raise rivers or fire triple barrels.

Your opponent in this hypothetical could have been trapping the entire time with Aces. They could have a set of eights they rivered. It doesn't matter what they specifically have. We just know it's unlikely they have worse. For that reason, we are going to fold.

Don't Doubt The Fake Maniac

Fake maniacs make all their money in these situations.

They might try a dangerous slowplay on this board with a set of sixes

or threes. They might have rivered a set of eights. They're shoving the river quickly because they want to piss you off into a call. They want to remind you of all the times they quickly three-bet you or raised you on the flop. They want you to feel like they're always bluffing.

Don't believe them. If you haven't seen them bluff a river, then don't trust them. They're likely value betting.

Live Tells

We have already discussed some basic tells you can use, such as timing tells on coordinated boards.

Let's now discuss how you can use tells to help you make thin river calls.

Let's think back to our hypothetical situation again:

We have A-Qo on a 6♥-3♥-2♠-Q♠-8♦ board. We checked the flop, bet 10BB on the turn, and bet 20BB on the river. Our opponent moved all-in on us immediately on the river for 61BB more. We're stuck.

We go through our questions. Does he do this with X? X is the best hand that we beat. Does he do this with a missed draw? Does he turn a pair into a bluff? Does he ever do this with a high card?

Sometimes, all we need are these questions. Perhaps we've seen our opponent overvalue one pair before. Perhaps we've seen them freak out with missed draws before. This could lead us to calling.

Most of the time, these questions will lead us to folding. We won't be able to prove our opponent has many weaker combinations, so we're going to fold.

However, on occasion, if you're playing live, you will be able to get some reads out of your opponent. These reads will let you know if your opponent is actually pissed off and running a reckless bluff.

People run reckless bluffs all the time when they're tilted. It's harder to catch these bluffs. When they show up to play, they're not tilted. They don't run bluffs then because they feel stupid when they get caught bluffing. Then, they lose a few pots and get tilted. They forget about their usual embarrassment when they get caught bluffing. They impulsively run one huge bluff. If the bluff succeeds, they calm down. They'll likely show their bluff, feel great, and not bluff again for the rest of the night.

Since these tilted bluffs are so fleeting, we have to use physical tells to identify them. Here's how you can spot bluffs in the live arena.