

Lexy Gavin-Mather

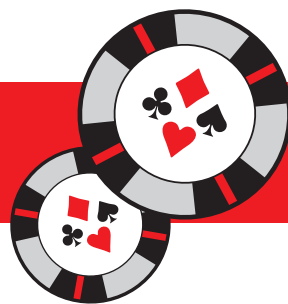


Lexy Gavin-Mather is a professional poker player, coach, content creator and business owner. Originally from New York she now lives in Las Vegas and California. Her poker journey began in 2009 since when she has studied poker relentlessly with some of the best players in the world including WSOP Main Event champion of 2012, Greg Merson. Lexy was ranked as the #1 female in the world at the WSOP in 2019 for number of cashes. Lexy was also the 2020 GPI Female Player of the Year.

Lexy has played live poker with the best players in the world, and has also multi-tabled dozens of tournaments online. She is a game theory expert and professional poker coach, regularly contributing to pokercoaching.com. She has a poker course called The Poker Accelerator (sign up at lexygavinmather.com) and a YouTube channel (Lexy Gavin Poker). She can also be found on Instagram, Tik Tok and X (Twitter) her name being LexyGavinPoker on all of them.

MASTERING SMALL STAKES NO-LIMIT TOURNAMENTS

Lexy Gavin-Mather



POKER

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FOREWORD

BY JONATHAN LITTLE

Over the past few years, D&B Poker have published several titles in a “Mastering...” series. I am delighted to say that the first of these was my own *Mastering Small Stakes NL Hold ‘Em* which has proved to be a popular text for the poker community. Subsequent titles include *Mastering Small Stakes PLO* and *Mastering Small Stakes Cash Games*.

I am equally delighted that D&B Poker have now published *Mastering Small Stakes NL Tournaments* by Lexy Gavin-Mather. I am certain this book will prove invaluable to those who are competent tournament players but want to take their poker skills to the next level. I have known Lexy for a long time and have tremendous respect for her deep understanding of the game as well as her ability to find simple ways to convey complex ideas. I was also very pleased when she agreed to be one of the coaches on my poker training site, pokercoaching.com.

Over the years she has provided tremendous content for pokercoaching.com and that is always in high demand. *Mastering Small Stakes NL Tournaments* is a distillation of her extensive knowledge and is likely to become the go-to book for players wanting to refine their knowledge of tournament play.

No-limit tournaments at the small stakes are potentially very profitable as the fields are generally full of recreational players who are primarily there to have fun. Because of this, the players are highly exploitable but you must understand exactly how they make themselves vulnerable and what adjustments you must make to cash in. Lexy explains how to do this in numerous different situations, revealing the best methods to exploit players who are too loose, too tight, on tilt, etc.

If your ambitions are to become a small stakes tournament crusher, then this book is for you.

Jonathan Little
Owner of PokerCoaching.com

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Mastering Small Stakes Poker Tournaments*.

Hey there! My name is Lexy Gavin-Mather and I'm a professional poker player, coach, business owner, content creator and TV co-host. I am so grateful that you are here and I'm beyond excited to help you in your journey to becoming a small stakes tournament crusher!

In this book, we will cover a wide range of topics designed to help you master small stakes poker tournaments. From understanding the basics to advanced tactics and strategies, you will find everything you need to succeed.

Whether you're a beginner looking to get started in tournaments or an experienced player looking to take your game to the next level, this book is for you. Let's get started on the journey to becoming a tournament master!

What is Poker About?

Poker is an incredibly fun and amazingly complex sport (and yes, you heard that right, poker is a sport). If you study, work hard, and put in volume at the

tables, your poker hobby could become very lucrative.

One of my favorite aspects of the game is that it is constantly evolving. The game is getting tougher each passing day. As the world of poker continues to evolve, new strategies and techniques are constantly being discovered and shared. It can feel like trying to solve a never-ending Rubik's cube with new squares constantly being added. Just when you think you have mastered the game, there is always more to learn and discover.

From the latest information appearing online to new books being published, the options for expanding your knowledge and improving your skills are endless. Whether you're a seasoned pro or new to the game, there is always more to learn and new ways to improve your strategy.

Although some people still consider poker to be a game of pure chance, it is widely understood to be a strategy game where you can win money in the long run. That is because unlike other games of chance, such as blackjack or roulette, you don't play against the house – you play against other players. For you to win, others have to lose.

That is why I love the sport of poker. I love how humbling it can be. I love the element of luck. The rush you get when you're all-in. The excitement of raking in a big pot. The adrenalin that shoots through your body when you have a deep run in a tournament. To me, there is no sport more exciting than poker.

Poker is also a personal game, and there is no one single rule of thumb that ensures victory. You will need to study, work hard, and take pieces of everything you learn and every mentor you learn from and develop your own personal style. It is impossible for you to play exactly like I do, just like it's impossible for me to play exactly like Daniel Negreanu does. The point of this book is to give you the tools and resources you need to help you develop your own style and find your groove in this world of poker.

Before I teach you how to absolutely crush your small stakes poker tournaments, I would like to share a little bit about myself and how I fell so deeply in love with this game.

About Me

I have always thought of myself as a female athlete in a male dominated sport. I pushed my body, my mind, my bankroll. I have undergone many ups and downs and learned many important lessons along the way.

I'm originally from New York and I currently live in Las Vegas and California. I went to college at Coastal Carolina University and I have a degree in political science. I had plans to go to law school but decided to pursue poker full-time instead. I'm so glad I did!

I began my poker journey in 2009 playing primarily online. I would "mass multi-table" meaning I would play up to 30 tables at once as opposed to playing in a live setting where you typically see around 30 hands an hour; I would see thousands of hands an hour. This volume really helped me learn the game quickly. After "Black Friday", when online poker was banned in the United States, I decided to move up to Canada with some of my poker peers including Greg Merson (WSOP Main Event champion of 2012), Ankush Mandavia, Rich Lyndaker (known as "nutsinho" online), and other poker legends to continue the online grind.

Night and day, we would play and study the game together. I would go back after each session, review every hand I played, and would try to correct the mistakes I made for the next session. I made a *ton* of mistakes! It's part of the game, but I really believe the amount of volume, studying, watching my peers and analyzing my mistakes is the greatest contributor to my success in poker.

Concerning my poker accomplishments: in terms of cashes, I was the most successful woman at the 2019 World Series of Poker. One of my best and worst attributes is that I am extremely competitive. My father taught me at a very young age that whatever I choose to do in life, I should strive to be the best at it. In 2020 I took this quite literally and set myself the goal of winning the 2020 Global Poker Index (GPI) Female Player of the Year. I grinded every single day, playing as many tournaments as I could to win the title. I set my mind to it and wound up achieving my goal on December 31st, 2020, finishing the year as #1 in the Female POY race. I was so happy I accomplished such an amazing feat. Unfortunately, due to Covid, the GPI put out a statement saying they had decided not to recognize the 2020 Player of the Year since a lot of people were still quarantining. I was incredibly disappointed. But regardless of the circumstances, I will always know that I was the 2020 Female Player of the Year.

From playing face to face with the best players in the world, to multi-tabling dozens of games online, as a game theory expert and professional poker coach I am excited to share with you the secrets, tips, tricks, and strategy techniques so you can begin to absolutely crush small stakes poker tournaments.

CHAPTER 5

CONTINUATION BETTING

A continuation bet, often just referred to as a “c-bet”, is when the player who was the last aggressor on the previous street continues the betting action. One of the biggest mistakes I see is when players c-bet way too much! This is one area of your game where a few simple adjustments will improve your profitability a lot.

As we have seen, in poker, you should always have a plan for your hand. Always know why you’re c-betting when you do. If you’re the pre-flop aggressor and are considering a c-bet post-flop, always ask yourself: “What am I trying to accomplish?” Do I want my opponents to fold? Am I trying to gain maximum value? Do I want to get to showdown as cheaply as possible?

When you’ve figured this out, you can begin to formulate the necessary strategy.

You should never bet to gain information or to “see where you’re at”.

Don't bet "to take control of the hand". Don't bet because you don't know what else to do. Have a plan for future streets and understand what it is you are trying to accomplish. While you're c-betting the flop, you should also be formulating your strategy for the turn.

I never want you to think, "I have air, I need to take it down with a c-bet." Instead, ask yourself intelligent questions like, "What kind of boards am I going to get folds from?" Or "What specific hands can I get to fold and how many streets should I fire to accomplish this?"

If you're bluffing, always consider what better hands you're trying to fold out. Here's the kind of thought process I go through during in-game situations:

The C-bet Thought Process

There are a few factors to consider when you think about c-betting. We have made a lot of these kinds of assessments in other situations discussed already.

- ◆ What class does my hand fall into?
- ◆ Balance
- ◆ Who has the range advantage?
- ◆ How many players are there in the hand?
- ◆ Who are my opponents and what are their tendencies?

Hand Class

The first thing you need to do is assign your hand to a class. You need to consider what your hand strength is relative to the board. The reason we classify our hands is to come up with an easy to memorize post-flop strategy.

Most hands fall into one of four classes, which I'll label Class A through D.

Class A

These are your value hands. These are hands like top pair, two pair, sets, straights, flushes, full houses, etc. For example, on a J♠-10♦-5♣ flop, your class A hands include A-A, K-K, Q-Q, J-J, 10-10, 5-5, J-10, J-5, 10-5, A-J, and K-J. (Note: although the premium pocket pairs – A-A, K-K and Q-Q – have not connected with the board, they are still better than top pair.)

Class B

These hands are your good draws. These include straight draws, flush draws, gutshot straight draws, and hands with backdoor equity. For example, on a 10♦-9♦-3♣ flop, your class B hands include holdings like Q-J, 8-7, all diamond combos, gutshots like Q-8, etc.

Class C

These and your medium strength hands. These are hands like good ace highs, bottom and middle pair, etc. For example, on a flop of A♣-6♥-3♠, your class C hands include J-J, 10-10, 9-9, 8-8, 7-7, some 6x combos, etc.

Class D

These are hands that have bricked the flop – i.e., hands that do not connect with the board at all. For example, 5♠-4♠ on a flop of A♦-K♦-Q♥.

Here's another example:

The flop is: J♥-10♥-7♠

Class A hands: A-A, K-K, Q-Q, J-J, 10-10, 7-7, J-10, 10-7, A-J, K-J and 9-8.

Class B hands: K-Q, Q-9, all flush draws, hands with gutshots or backdoor equity like A♠-8♠, K♠-9♠, etc.

Class C hands: A-10, K-10, 9-9, 8-8, A-7, etc.

Class D hands: 2-2 – 6-6, A♦-4♦, 6♣-5♣, etc.

Balance

As we have seen, balance is essential in poker. You never want to do the same thing every time. That's how you become exploitable. The same applies to continuation betting.

If we want to keep our continuation bets balanced, we need to group the hand classes together. In general, you can take your Class A hands (your value hands) and your Class B hands (draws) and your default strategy is to c-bet them. To simplify: you're usually going to c-bet with value hands and draws.

Your default strategy for Class C and Class D hands is to check. In other words, you're going to check all medium-strength hands and garbage.

This simple default strategy makes you difficult to play against. You can often get value when you want it and folds when you need them. (Of course, there are some exceptions, and we'll cover them in a bit.)

Now that you understand how to classify and group your hands, let me tell you about a foolproof c-bet strategy.

For your Class A value hands, you should ask yourself: "How many streets of value can I get?" If you think you can get three streets (i.e., if you think your opponent might call on flop, turn and river), then start betting these hands on the flop.

When it comes to your Class C middling hands, you will often have the best hand, but checking allows you to control the size of the pot. It also denies your opponents the chance to check/raise.

Range Advantage

If you're thinking about a c-bet, you should always look at the board texture and decide who has the range advantage. Ask yourself: "What is my hand strength relative to the board? Am I likely to get raised here? Can my hand stand up against a raise?"

If you have a mediocre Class A hand like top pair on a wet board that favors your opponent's range, you may want to consider checking instead of c-betting.

Let's look at an example of c-betting based on range advantage.

You open J♠-10♠ from middle-position with 100BB effective stacks and get called by the big blind. The flop is A♠-K♦-9♣. You should elect to c-bet here because you have the range advantage plus a Class B drawing hand.

This hand has great backdoor equity. You have a gutshot draw to a Broadway straight, and backdoor flush draw. A typical mid-position opening range is roughly 20% of hands. You can have all the strong A-x and K-x combos. You can have all the sets, and two pair combos like A-K, A-9s, K-9s, etc.

The player in the big blind, on the other hand, is calling pre-flop with a very wide range. They already have a blind invested and they're getting better odds to call. The big blind is therefore going to have a lot of hands that bricked this flop, like 10-8s, J-7s, pockets deuces, K-8s, etc.

You can comfortably c-bet knowing that the big blind is going to have to fold a lot. Remember to always have a plan for the hand, so when you c-bet

and get called, you know you can continue barreling on any spade turn and any Qx.

How Many Players in the Hand?

Thinking about a c-bet? You'll need to know how many players went to the flop.

Remember, the more players there are, the more likely it is that someone has a hand that has connected with any flop. Generally, you want to be more honest and straightforward in multiway pots. You should bluff much less frequently. There's a much higher chance you'll be checking.

If you are heads-up (or maybe three-way), you can widen your c-betting range slightly – but remember your hand classes.

Assess Your Opponents

You will also want to consider what type of opponent(s) you are facing. If you know your opponent calls wide pre-flop but overfolds post-flop, you can c-bet wider. If they're sticky, you may want to consider checking more with your draws.

Exceptions to the Rule

There are a few exceptions to these c-betting rules. There are times, for instance, where you may want to c-bet your Class C middling hands if your hands are vulnerable and require protection.

Typically, we don't bet solely for protection. It's more of a bonus reason to bet in borderline spots. Betting for protection can put you in more difficult situations on future streets and is similar to "betting to see where you're at" – another big mistake recreational players can make.

If you've determined the situation to be a close call between a c-bet and a check, but you feel your hand is vulnerable to being outdrawn, you may want to lean towards a bet. For example, if you have a medium strength hand with a bad kicker – something like 8x-7x on a flop of Qx-8x-3x. You may want to consider c-betting here to protect your equity from overcards. It's especially preferable if your opponent is tight and you don't have to worry about getting raised. Checking back with a hand like Ax-8x is better because this hand isn't as vulnerable.

Another exception to general c-betting rules comes about if you're in late position and action is checked to you in a multiway pot post-flop. If it goes check, check and you have a Class C or D hand, you can sometimes bet on later streets. Some Class C hands can start betting for value and protection on the turn. For example, high card hands like Kx can bet on the turn when the flop checks around. Low card/no equity hands can try bluffing the turn or river if the flop checks around.

Assessing Board Texture for a C-bet

Now let's discuss c-bets on different types of board textures and what sizing we should use for each.

In poker there are many types of board textures. We have dry boards, wet boards, high card boards, low card boards, paired boards, and monotone boards.

We have already mentioned my coach Cog's lesson: "Bet sizing is a function of frequency". The more often you c-bet, the smaller your sizing should be. The less often you c-bet, the bigger your sizing should be. It's important again here.

Dry Boards

A "dry board" is unconnected and non-threatening – something like J♥-7♠-2♦. You'll want to bet here at a high frequency. Always think about how many streets of value you can get. Your opponents are less likely to flop a hand they can continue with on dry textures. They won't have as many draws to call with, but they may float a c-bet with ace high.

If you have a premium hand on a dry texture, you may want to consider a delayed c-bet. That means you wait until the turn to bet if you don't think you can get three streets of value. It's an example of how you evaluate the board texture and then formulate your strategy.

You should be barreling dry boards at a high frequency, so you should use a smaller sizing. Remember, the more often we bet the smaller we should go. If your opponent is less likely to have a hand to call, you'll want to size your bets smaller so that they have a better price to float you with their underpairs, ace highs or backdoor equity. A 20-25% pot size bet will get the job done.

Wet Boards

In direct contrast to dry boards, wet boards are textures that are connected. They contain flush draws, straight draws and sometimes both. It follows that they require a different strategy.

On wet boards, you'll want to bet with caution and beware of raises. You'll also want to bluff less. If you c-bet bluff on a connected board you are more likely to face a raise and be forced to fold.

When we flop a Class B drawing hand, we should be c-betting but with a larger sizing, somewhere around 75% pot. Remember, we don't c-bet draw heavy boards often, so we should choose a bigger sizing when we do. This charges people more for their draws. Also, sizing bigger makes you less susceptible to getting raised than if you were to go smaller.

High Card Boards

Here comes Captain Obvious: high card boards are boards with high cards on them! An example of a high card board is something like A-Q-8. Your continuation bet frequency should go down. This is because you don't have to worry about equity denial as much. When I say equity denial, I just mean the practice of denying your opponent the chance to hit a card that improves their hand on either turn or river.

For example, a hand like 10-10 on a flop of A-Q-8 requires less equity denial with the ace and queen out there because the only two other overcards to your hand are a king and a jack. So you have less incentive to protection bet in a spot like this. For these reasons, if you do elect to c-bet, you can choose a smaller sizing.

Low Card Boards

Low card boards are boards with all low cards. Captain Obvious strikes back! Here your continuation bet frequency increases. Unlike high card boards, you want to deny your opponents equity for hitting their overcards, so you'll want to choose a larger sizing.

For example, on a 6-3-2 flop, betting big charges your opponents more to float you with their ace highs, king highs, and hands like 7-5 where they can hit an overcard or a gutshot straight. Remember, if they have any two overcards they have six outs and roughly 25% equity.

C-betting accomplishes equity denial and allows you to bet them off the hand on the turn. Charging your opponents more disincentives them from floating with hands that have equity to improve and is a great way to pick up some pots.

Paired Boards

Paired boards are boards that have, wait for it, pairs on them! Here, your c-bet frequency increases. This is because your opponent is less likely to have connected with the flop so you can barrel with almost your entire range.

If you are facing a super tight player and you have a premium hand like A-A on a paired flop, you're not always going to get three streets of value. You may want to consider checking the flop and allowing them the opportunity to improve on the turn. However, in a vacuum, you should barrel very wide on paired boards.

You'll want to use smaller sizing. If you go small, you keep in your opponents' lighter floats on the flop and can then barrel them off on the turn. Betting big is simply not necessary because if they do call, they probably have something good. In this instance, a small sizing saves you chips.

Monotone Boards

Monotone boards are boards that have cards of all the same suit. For example, a flop of K♣-6♣-3♣. Here, your c-bet frequency increases.

If your opponent doesn't have a club, they are going to have a hard time calling. If they flopped a pair, they'll likely call a flop c-bet, so if another club comes on the turn or river, you'll want to barrel more aggressively and put them in a tough spot.

You'll want to use a larger sizing. This is because if they do have a club, you want to charge them to hit their draw. Betting for protection is justifiable on monotone flops.

Turn and River C-bet Strategy

If you get to the turn or river and are thinking about another bet, you will want to follow the same type of formula as your flop c-bet strategy. Think in terms of hand class, range, opponent tendencies and how many people are left in the hand.