



Dylan Linde is a professional poker player originally from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. A lifelong competitive gamer, Dylan was introduced to poker at age 23. He applied concepts learned from non-poker games to quickly excel at online Limit Hold'em and sit'n'gos. He soon made poker his career and primary focus.

Dylan has subsequently branched off into all forms of poker. He has amassed over \$6 million in online tournament cashes across a variety of games, with multiple final tables and titles in the major online poker series. Being a firm believer that strategic concepts are valid across games, Dylan splits his time between No-limit Hold'em tournaments and mixed games in both cash and tournament formats. His lifetime earnings in live poker exceed \$3 million and he has cashed in WSOP events on more than 50 occasions. In December 2018, Dylan won the WPT Five Diamond World Poker Classic for \$1.6 million. Living in Las Vegas has afforded him the opportunity to play a variety of high stakes mixed games in between travelling for tournaments. Dylan is also a poker coach and a longtime provider of elite training content for *RunItOnce.com*.

MASTERING MIXED GAMES

WINNING STRATEGIES FOR DRAW, STUD AND FLOP GAMES

DYLAN LINDE



POKER

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Introduction

Mixed game poker is somewhat of a misnomer as each game in a mix can be played individually and games not commonly referred to as “mixed games” also appear in mixes around the world. In general when people talk about mixed games they are referring to any game that is not No-limit Hold’em or Pot-Limit Omaha. There is a dizzying array of games available under this moniker. Fortunately, many of the games that fall into this category can be learned and mastered by applying strategies understood from similar games. Throughout this book we will build core concepts that can be applied not only in the games that are the centerpiece of most modern mixed game lineups but also to teach some underlying strategies that will carry over into some of the more fringe variants that can pop up.

The vast majority of poker players come from a Hold’em background, either No-limit or Limit and tend to specialize in the one game that they know. The rules (and even the names!) of some of the mixed games can be intimidating for people with only Hold’em experience. Mix games are full of concepts that are utterly alien to Hold’em players, such as: extra cards, split-pots, hi-low qualifiers, no community cards, up-cards etc. This plethora of differences does a fantastic job of obscuring the similarities between the games to the casual eye. However, when you cut down to the core, poker games all revolve around the same basic themes: balancing your ranges, considering pot odds, maximizing value using aggression, correct

range construction of your opponents etc. In this instance range is defined as the range of hands we think our opponents are playing and our own possible range of hands.

Moving from one game to another is, at its essence, just learning how to value new ranges in a new game. It is true that there are some concepts in the mix game family that do not exist in Hold'em or Pot-Limit Omaha. These are mostly strategies that are used specifically in split-pot games. Nevertheless, the idea of range evaluation still permeates the optimal strategies, even in those games. Becoming proficient in one game will inevitably lead to the ability to learn multiple other games much more easily. The beauty of this underlying similarity between poker games (and, indeed, all strategy games) is that the reverse is also true. Learning a new game and new ways of thinking about your range versus your opponent's range will inevitably lead to an increase in mental flexibility and new insights in your core game.

There are two basic types of games found in the mix. Split-pot and one-winner games. One-winner games are fairly self-explanatory as the majority of pots will go to one player, barring an unlikely chop of some sort. Split-pot games are different in that all money put into the pot is split between two different qualifications. In most split-pot games this is divided between a high and a low but a couple of the games discussed in this book will also split the pot between a combination of two games turned into one game. In one-winner games all hands that you play serve only one purpose – to win the entire pot. Split-pot games are different in this respect. Equities of hands run extremely close in most split-pot games and this factor, combined with the limit betting structure used in the majority of games, means that pots are generally contested multi-way far more often. The best hands can, of course, win both sides of the pot, but because of the nature of the equities running close and pots being large with multiple players the value of the “one-way” hands can be quite high. A one-way hand can be defined as a hand that has a low to extremely low chance of winning one half of the pot but has great strength for the other half. These sort of one-way hands provide an opportunity for value that is much more rare in

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one-way games, the ability to extract value by allowing more players into the pot rather than thinning the field. This might sound like a complicated concept but it is a concept that will become much easier to understand and utilize as we delve into some of the specificities of the different games.

The primary goal of this book is to create an introduction to some of the most common games found in the realm of mixed game poker and build some strategies as to how to beat them. The less apparent goal is to teach a way of strategic thinking, in regards to poker in general, that will allow you to confidently compete in a game that you may have never played or even heard of before. This sort of flexibility in thinking is critical in an environment that constantly has new games being created and rotated into popularity.

I have enjoyed writing this book and hope that it will encourage a whole new generation of players to explore the weird and wonderful world of mixed game poker. I am grateful to David Macklin for valuable contributions in the chapters on Stud, Stud 8, Limit Omaha 8-or-Better and Badugi.

Dylan Linde, June 2019

Chapter Four

Stud High

Introduction

There are two forms of stud poker. One, Five-Card Stud, is no longer played, while Seven-Card Stud, in its various incarnations, is a popular part of most mixed games. In Seven-Card Stud each player is initially dealt two cards down and one up. Instead of having blinds, each player antes and there is a forced bet called the bring-in. Depending on which variation of Stud you are playing, the bring-in is either the lowest or highest up-card and is the same size as the ante. For example, in Stud High the lowest card is the bring-in and in Razz the highest card is the bring-in. One eccentricity of Stud is that the size of the antes and the bring-in is related to the limits but not in a fixed way. For example, in many \$75/\$150 mixed games the ante and bring-in is \$25. Alternatively, in most \$75/\$150 straight stud games the ante and bring-in is \$15. This is important because the size of the ante will have an impact on how loose or tight you should play.

After everyone has been dealt in and the bring-in has been declared, the bring-in then has the option of betting either the minimum or making it a full bet. For example, in Stud High with a \$25 ante and a \$25 bring-in, the bring-in can bet either \$25 or \$75. If the bring-in bets \$25 then subsequent players can either call the \$25 or complete the bet to \$75. In stud games specifically the term “complete” is used for the first raise over

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the size of the bring-in. The players behind can then call or re-raise just like in other forms of poker.

Once third street is completed all the players who are still in the hand are dealt a fourth card and this is an up-card. There is then a further element unique to Stud: position now shifts. In Stud High and Stud 8 the high hand bets, in Razz the low hand bets. There is then a further round of small bet betting. Here there is also a feature unique to Stud High (out of all the stud games). If, on fourth street, a player pairs their door-card (the first up-card), any player may choose to make a double bet. So, in the example of the \$75/\$150 game, if a player pairs their door-card then any player could bet \$150 as opposed to the \$75 that is normally allowed on this street. For this street you are allowed to bet or raise either limit when an open pair is on the board. If a player chooses to bet \$75 another player could raise to \$150 or \$225 in this specific circumstance. Once the double bet has been made the only raise size allowed would be to double that bet (i.e. a double bet to \$150 would mean the raise has to be to \$300).

Next comes fifth street. All players still in the hand are dealt another up-card and the bet size doubles. The structure of sixth street is the same as fifth. All players left in are dealt a final up-card and there is a further round of big bet betting.

On seventh street, the final card is dealt down and then there is a final round of betting.

We will be looking at three stud games in this book: Stud High, Razz and Stud 8. While these games might appear different, they are actually very similar. They are played in the same fashion but the best hands are on the opposite side of the hand-ranking spectrum when thinking in Hold'em hand-ranking terms. You are going to use a lot of the same concepts and theories across the games. All three of these games tend to play very big relative to the stake as there are quite a few betting rounds with hands often going to showdown. Hand equities also run quite a bit closer than in Hold'em. For example, consider the following Stud High hand:

Hand	Equity
(A-K)-A	66.26%
(K-K)-A	33.74%

When you consider that in Hold'em a similar situation of A-A against K-K would make the A-A approximately an 80% favorite, you can see that hand equities tend to be less far apart in stud poker. This difference in equities can make the game a bit frustrating as your strong starting hands can more easily get run down, but it also creates action and leads to some considerable edges for skilled players.

Third Street

How tight you play here will be determined by the size of the ante and the boards (up-cards) that are out against you. First, let's consider some third street equities to see what types of hands have enough immediate equity to steal. I will use six-handed play for most of the examples as a six-player table is about the median handedness for Stud when played in mixed formats. It is an ante game, which means people are going to tend to walk or take breaks during Stud as there is no optimal position to stand up for a break. If you think about a game with blinds you often want to wait till you are under the gun to take an extended break to maximize your equity from playing the previous positions. In Stud there is no such restriction and consequently players often choose this game for a quick walk away from the table.

Furthermore, since most mixed games are seven-handed, the game will often be five- and six-handed when one or two players are absent. In a six-handed game, where everyone's door-cards are live, one of the other players will have paired their card about 70% of the time. This means that the cards behind you will have a huge impact on your equity and your hand.

In a six-handed \$75/\$150 game with a \$25 ante and \$25 bring-in there will be \$150 in antes and a \$25 bring-in. If you are first in you will

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be betting \$75 to attempt to win \$175, getting 2.33-to-1. You therefore need about 30% or better equity to show an immediate profit for the steal. What types of hands have this much equity first open? Basically, only kings or aces or better – as can be seen below:

Hand	Equity
(3-K)-K	28.33%
(x-x)-2	12.78%
(x-x)-5	14.90%
(x-x)-Q	14.31%
(x-x)-J	14.55%
(x-x)-10	15.12%

Hand	Equity
(3-A)-A	32.04%
(x-x)-2	11.82%
(x-x)-5	13.47%
(x-x)-Q	14.20%
(x-x)-J	14.45%
(x-x)-6	14.01%

Hand	Equity
(3-Q)-Q	25.94%
(x-x)-2	13.34%
(x-x)-5	14.79%
(x-x)-8	15.44%
(x-x)-J	15.47%
(x-x)-6	15.02%

In practice no one will ever fold queens here as the highest card, but it is worth noting how much more vulnerable your hand becomes as your pair becomes weaker. This is for two reasons. Firstly, there will be more overcards to your pair and, secondly, Stud is a game of card removal. You are going to see a lot of cards and so if you have jacks, and your jack is the highest door-card, this means one of two things. Either the other players have high cards in the hole, which would make it likely that someone has a big buried pair, or the rest of the deck is high card heavy, thus making it easier for someone to catch a random big pair later in the hand.

In the above example, the other players had live up-cards. Let's look at what happens when your opponents up-cards are somewhat dead:

Hand	Equity
(3-Q)-Q	27.17%
(x-x)-J	14.21%
(x-x)-J	14.23%
(x-x)-8	15.52%
(x-x)-6	14.52%
(x-x)-6	14.35%

This might not look overly exciting but you have picked up about 2% more equity because the other players have duplicated (and thus slightly dead) up-cards.

All this means is that, even with a large ante (and \$25 in a \$75/\$150 game is very large), you need to play very tight in the first spot. You should play aces, kings, queens and split pairs with an ace or king live kicker. This means a hand such as (A-10)-10.

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Hand	Equity
(A-10)-10	28.45%
(x-x)-K	14.31%
(x-x)-K	14.29%
(x-x)-8	14.94%
(x-x)-6	14.04%
(x-x)-6	13.97%

The high side card (a side card is the unpaired card that accompanies a split pair) makes this hand very strong. In fact, you will notice it has more equity than the queens from the earlier example. This is because there is an easy way for this hand to improve to a super-premium two pair, whereas the queens will really only ever make queens-up. The side card doesn't have to be an ace but does need to be bigger than the rest of the up-cards.

Another extra equity boost to be aware of is having a two-flush or two-straight to go along with your pair. These will add approximately 2% equity to your hand. Take a look at how a hand with a three-flush and a three-straight fares.

Hand	Equity
(7♦-8♦)-9♦	29.35%
(x-x)-K	14.66%
(x-x)-K	14.47%
(x-x)-8	13.70%
(x-x)-Q	13.94%
(x-x)-Q	13.88%

These equities require that all your outs are live. If this is the case, you have 29% equity. If your outs are compromised then the hand is often unplayable.

Hand	Equity
(7♦-8♦)-9♦	23.33%
(x-x)-10♦	14.36%
(x-x)-J♦	14.56%
(x-x)-8	15.26%
(x-x)-Q♦	14.80%
(x-x)-5♥	17.69%

All of your straight and flush hands should either be a combination hand (a straight plus a flush draw) or have at least two overcards to the likely paired hands. This will give you some extra equity besides making your flush. For example, if a 9♣ completes, you would like to play a hand such as (4♦-10♦)-J♦ and not as much a hand like (2♦-3♦)-7♦.

(A♠-3♠)-J♠ is a radically different hand from, say, (2♠-7♠)-J♠. The straight-only hands that you play should be all high card hands, as there is a large equity difference between (10-J)-K and (4-5)-6.

Middle Position

Let's now look at how your equity changes with fewer opponents.

Hand	Equity
(7-Q)-7	27.14%
(x-x)-4	17.52%
(x-x)-J	19.69%
(x-x)-9	18.77%
(x-x)-3	16.88%

Hand	Equity
(7-Q)-7	32.90%
(x-x)-4	21.10%
(x-x)-J	23.63%
(x-x)-9	22.36%

With between three and four opponents remaining you can start to open with any pairs.

It is also worth noting how wide you should be opening in late position.

Hand	Equity
(2-3)-10	21.06%
(J-J)-4	78.94%

Hand	Equity
(2-3)-10	41.08%
(x-x)-4	58.92%

You can visualize third street betting in Stud as a funnel: tight at the top but very wide further down. This also means that, unless your opponents are astute, they will not notice how tight you are up front and will tend to remember how loose you are in late position. This should lead to them giving you excessive up-front action.

Facing a Raise

Considering the math enables you to see what types of hands you should be using for re-raising.

Let's say you have buried queens and a 10 door-card completes in front of you. You should, obviously, re-raise here because you have the best hand.

However, a further reason is that, as can be seen below, the bring-in

with a random hand has decent equity and, if you call instead of raising, they will be putting \$50 into \$325. Letting them in, even with a random hand, is a mistake.

Hand	Equity
(J-10)-10	32.14%
(Q-Q)-8	46.91%
(x-x)-3	20.95%

Hand	Equity
(J-10)-10	37.93%
(Q-Q)-8	62.07%

I would also like to illustrate how close these hands are if you have a bigger pair and are barely ahead. This means that you can attack better hands because the pot overlay will make up for the (usually) minimal negative equity. Furthermore, if you make the ten's side card an ace, it is getting close to a flip.

Hand	Equity
(A-10)-10	43.14%
(Q-Q)-8	56.86%

This strategic implication here is that you should often re-raise to get heads-up. For example, playing \$75/\$150, it gets folded to middle position. The player opens with a queen door-card and you have (A-9)-9. Even if you know they have queens you should still re-raise if you think this will get it heads-up. You will be putting \$150 into a \$325 pot, thus getting 2.2-to-1. Therefore, you need 31.3% equity for the re-raise to break even. As you can see, you have much more than that:

Hand	Equity
(A-9)-9	42.69%
(Q-8)-Q	57.31%

You shouldn't get too overzealous with this move since either the player with the queen or the bring-in could wake up with a monster. However, the times when they have a monster should be balanced by the times they have a hand worse than yours. You just need to be cognizant that the greatest value from the isolation raise here is from the combination of steal equity from players who may call behind, mixed with being able to balance the times you have (A-9)-9 with the times you have (A-A)-9. You should not play those two hands differently on this street, though it is important to remember that you can be far behind occasionally. For example, on the rare occasions they are rolled up you are in a lot of trouble:

Hand	Equity
(A-A)-Q	66.40%
(A-9)-9	33.60%

Hand	Equity
(Q-Q)-Q	92.42%
(A-9)-9	7.58%

Despite this, you should always three-bet versus a raiser, unless you have a very specific reason not to. For example, if there is a very weak player behind you or in the bring-in. You want to three-bet in order to take the lead, push the other players out of the pot to pick up the dead money, and stop them from realizing any equity they might have. Furthermore, you always want your range to be uncapped and three-betting accomplishes all of these goals.

Stud High Quiz 2

Game: \$40/\$80 Mixed Game with a \$10 ante: 6-handed

Hand: (K♣-9♦)-9♥

Position: N/A

The 7♥ brings it in for \$10. The 10♠ folds, the J♣ folds. The Q♦ completes to \$40. You have the (K♣-9♦)-9♥ with a 7♠ behind.

Question 1

Do you a) Fold b) Call c) Raise

(a)

(b)

(c)

Raise.

You raise to \$80. The 7♠ folds and the 7♥ folds. The Q♦ calls \$80. The Q♦ catches the 6♦. You catch the J♦, leaving you with (K♣-9♦)-9♥-J♦. The (x-x)-Q♦-6♦ checks.

Question 2

Do you a) Bet b) Check

(a)

(b)

Bet.

You bet \$40 and your opponent calls \$40. The Q♦-6♦ catches the 6♣. You catch the 4♣, leaving you with (K♣-9♦)-9♥-J♦-4♣. The (x-x)-Q♦-6♦-6♣ bets \$80.

Question 3

Do you a) Fold b) Call c) Raise

(a)

(b)

(c)

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Call.

You call \$80. The $Q\spadesuit-6\spadesuit-6\clubsuit$ catches the $2\heartsuit$. You catch the $K\heartsuit$, leaving you with $(K\clubsuit-9\spadesuit)-9\heartsuit-J\spadesuit-4\clubsuit-K\heartsuit$. The $(x-x)-Q\spadesuit-6\spadesuit-6\clubsuit-2\heartsuit$ bets \$80.

Question 4

Do you a) Fold b) Call c) Raise

(a)

(b)

(c)

Raise.

You raise to \$160 and your opponent calls \$160. You catch the $3\clubsuit$, leaving you with $(K\clubsuit-9\spadesuit)-9\heartsuit-J\spadesuit-4\clubsuit-K\heartsuit-(3\clubsuit)$. The $(x-x)-Q\spadesuit-6\spadesuit-6\clubsuit-2\heartsuit-(x)$ checks.

Question 5

Do you a) Bet b) Check

(a)

(b)

Bet.

Stud High Quiz 2: Answers and Analysis

Answer 1

c) Raise

This is a great steal spot for the $Q\spadesuit$ with your $9\heartsuit$ and the two 7s behind. You will be pushing equity against the $Q\spadesuit$'s steal hands and also cleaning up your pot share by likely getting the hand heads-up. Even if the opponent has split queens you are not too far behind with your overcard kicker.

Answer 2

a) Bet

You will still have the best hand against steals and have picked up a smidgeon more equity in the form of the J♦ bringing a three straight. Against split queens you still are not very far behind, and you have no real reason to believe your opponent has split queens a majority of the time at this stage in the hand.

Answer 3

b) Call

Your opponent will be leading here with a very high frequency due to the strength of their board. They will be leading with many of their steal attempts that have a pair, plus maybe a three-flush, or just hoping to garner folds from your hands by representing queens up. Queens up and a flush draw plus the pair of 6s are also likely holdings, but you will have enough equity to continue against the entirety of their range. You must call \$80 to win \$390 and thus only need 17% equity. You can see below that even when the opponent has queens up (one of the worst-case scenarios) you have the right price to continue.

Dead cards: J, 10, 7, 7	
Hand	Equity
Q♦-Q♥-4♠-6♦-6♥	78.39%
K♦-9♣-9♥-J♦-4♣	21.61%

Answer 4

c) Raise

You have now made kings up and should be far ahead of the holdings your opponent has. This is the premium street on which to extract value with this hand and there is no reason to slowplay till seventh street.

Answer 5

a) Bet

The strength of your hand may be a little face-up, but your opponent will be getting laid such extreme odds that they will have to pay off with many worse two-pair combinations. You could still have had some semi-bluffs on sixth street and the pot is quite large at this stage.