

Learning about the “Four Pillars of Postflop Strategy” reframed my decision making process in even the closest spots. Now I feel more comfortable identifying when a hand is a clear raise, call, or fold on the flop, and find myself in fewer marginal situations on later streets than previously.

Mastering Small Stakes Pot-Limit Omaha should be required reading for any player new to PLO or transitioning from NLHE. Fernando has spent more time engaged in a deep study of PLO than anyone on the planet, so you can be confident his recommended strategies are +EV in any game format and will remain so for many years to come.

- John Beauprez, WSOP Bracelet Winner and Founder of PLOQuickPro.com

The days when you could be successful in poker by only playing and sometimes reviewing your own hands is long gone. If you are serious about improving and want to take your game to the next level, *Mastering Small Stakes Pot-Limit Omaha* is one of the best purchases you can make.

- Einars, Amateur Poker Player

Even though I have been a professional poker player and student for more than a decade, this is the first time I really feel like one. This is thanks to Fernando and the PLO Mastermind team.

- Arthur aka pechcore, Yearly PLO Mastermind member

I was able to move from playing low to mid-high stakes PLO in an incredibly short time frame by following Fernando’s coaching. He taught me how to think as a crusher and how to push myself every day to find new methods and new routines that could improve my game and my life as a whole.”

- Diego Montone, Amateur Poker Player

MASTERING SMALL STAKES POT-LIMIT OMAHA

Fernando 'JNADEZ' Habegger



POKER

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Introduction

I started playing poker online in the late 2000s after having played live poker for a couple of years. Online play was much more accessible for players around the world, and everyone could rail the biggest games in the world from their own house as hundreds of thousands of dollars flew over the table in the blink of an eye. The online poker dream was born.

The players who won the most money in the early days of online poker were mainly the players who were the best live players and they had a very exploitative style of play. Some of those players still rank very high on the all-time biggest winners list in online cash games – simply because they took advantage of a new opportunity.

After a few years, new technologies and software programs became available. These included equity calculators and tools to analyze ranges. Players rising to the top of the game started to work with this new software. This gave them a massive edge in creating a solid strategy.

Since about 2015, we have witnessed the development of more powerful poker software, especially solvers. This has enabled a new crop of players to rise to the summit of the poker world. The current elite players have an excellent understanding of how to use these programs in order to find mistakes in their opponent's strategies, while also improving their own.

In today's poker environment, solvers and other types of software play a huge role in the creation of successful strategies. Learning how to work with

these programs can cost a lot of time, energy, and money. I understand this well because I have spent hundreds, if not thousands, of hours working with numerous different software programs to figure out how to beat my opponents.

Over the last few years I have dedicated myself to researching the game, putting into practice what I have learned in some of the toughest online games and teaching these strategies to thousands of passionate poker players who are serious about taking their PLO game to the next level.

The information that you will find in this book comes from the thousands of hours that I put into playing, teaching, and studying Pot Limit Omaha. I have tried to create a fundamental blueprint that will increase your understanding of how to execute a winning PLO strategy.

In addition to changes in technology, we are also seeing changes in poker formats. Initially Stud changed to Limit Hold'em as the main format and then in the last few decades No-Limit Hold'em has taken over. Nowadays, it is No-Limit Hold'em (NLHE) tournaments that are thriving. NLHE cash is also being played almost everywhere. PLO gains traction in some cities more than others as well as during specific times such as tournaments. I remember each of the last few WSOP trips I've been on and I've been happy to see more tables offering PLO with each consecutive year. Many experienced players are now looking for a new challenge, and want to regain that excitement you feel for a game when you are first introduced to it and discovering how to play it.

An important thing to mention is that I've often found that the PLO tables are often the most enjoyable place in the poker room. There is not as much tension in PLO because many decisions come naturally (although they may be wrong) and most players feel as if they have a shot at winning. The game offers more action and excitement to players who want to see a lot of flops and go all-in and think the game is similar enough to NLHE, where they understand the basics.

Whatever stage you are at in your PLO development, this book will quickly take you through the basics and then into the deeper nuances of PLO. One of the biggest mistakes when approaching PLO is to play it like NLHE. If you're someone who is ready for a new challenge within poker, then this book will have something for you. We're going to start out right, by setting the stage for a correct approach to Pot Limit Omaha strategy.

Fernando Habegger

Category Two: Broadway Pairs

Introduction

This category includes all hands that are holding a Broadway pair, excluding Aces, two pair hands, and hands with three or four cards of the same rank. There are a total of 25,433 different hands in this category, which means that you get dealt one of these hands about 9.36% of the time.

This category is relatively strong but also very diverse. The hand with the highest EV in this category is $A♥-K♥-K♠-J♠$, which ranks in the top 1% of hands. The average rank of this category is 17.18%.

Players learning PLO often overvalue Broadway pairs. Although hands such as Kings and Queens are quite profitable when played correctly, they can also get you into trouble, especially if you systematically overplay them. However, in this section, we will discuss how to avoid this common pitfall.

04

RFI strategy

Early Position

From EP, only about 35% of the hands that belong in this category should be open-raised. There are some traits that all hands that want to open-raise have in common.

The first is the importance of having an Ace. A hand with two Kings but without an Ace only wants to open-raise 50% of the time. If you are holding an Ace alongside your Kings, you want to open-raise 100%! This concept is very similar when it comes to Queens, Jacks, or Tens. Although you don't want to open 100% of these pairs with an Ace, the open raising frequency drastically increases when you do hold an Ace compared to not holding an Ace.

The reason why the Ace is such an important component is simple. When you are holding a high pocket pair, you hate to get 3-bet because you are so often up against, and dominated by, Aces. Holding an Ace makes it less likely that one of your opponents has Aces, and therefore decreases the chance that you will face a 3-bet preflop. Given that you can also hit a top pair with an Ace on the flop, the EV of open raising a Broadway pair is much higher when you are holding an Ace.

Although Queens are not as strong as Kings, with $A-Q-Q-x$, you still want

to open-raise very close to 100%. When you are holding Jacks or Tens plus an Ace, you want to open slightly less frequently. To be specific, only the top 80% of all Jacks and Tens with an Ace should be raised. You want to fold the Jacks and Tens with the worst suitedness or connectivity.

When you are not holding an Ace, the rank of your pair becomes much more important. Without an Ace, you want to raise close to 50% of all Kings, but only about 14% of Tens. The Tens you do want to open-raise have either high suits, great connectivity or both.

An example of Tens without an Ace that you want to open-raise is $10\spadesuit-10\heartsuit-9\clubsuit-8\diamonds$. This hand is exactly single-suited to the ten, and it is well connected, meaning that you can call a 3-bet with it. An example of a hand that you don't want to open-raise with is $K\heartsuit-10\heartsuit-10\spadesuit-2\spadesuit$. This hand looks nice because it is double-suited but the connectivity is very marginal given the deuce is a total dangler. This hand can't call 3-bets and it also doesn't do that well in multiway pots due to the lack of nuttiness. You want to fold this hand preflop.

Additional Notes:

- ◆ When you are holding a suited Ace alongside your Broadway pair, you want to open-raise very close to 100% (except for some of the worst trip-suited or monotone pocket pairs). If you open-raise from EP, the chance that you will end up playing a multiway pot is high and, with a suited Ace, your hand will do much better in multiway pots.
- ◆ When you are holding pocket pairs with two cards that are five or lower you almost always want to fold. With such low cards, your hand is disconnected, not very nutted, and raising from early position becomes unprofitable.

Button

As you get closer to the Button, you should start opening much wider. On the Button, you are supposed to open-raise about 94% of all Broadway pairs, an increase from 35% when playing EP. An example of a hand that should be folded, even from the Button, is $10\heartsuit-10\spadesuit-5\spadesuit-2\spadesuit$. The equity realizability of this hand is very poor because it has very few great flops. You should just fold this hand, especially at small stakes or live games with loose opponents.

Facing a Single Raiser (MP Versus EP)

When you sit in MP and a player opens from EP, most Broadway pairs should be folded. You want to fold the bottom 77% of Broadway pairs, call 17% and 3-bet about 6% of the time.

Calling MP Versus EP

The most important determinant here is the rank of your pair. With Kings you have the highest calling frequency (31%) and with tens you have the lowest calling frequency (11%). The hands you want to call with need to have strong connectivity and suitedness to justify a call. As your pair rank gets lower, the other components of the hand must improve to make calling and likely heading into a multiway pot the highest EV play.

Let's consider two hand examples. In both situations, you sit in MP, and you are facing an open-raise from EP playing 100bb. The only difference between the two examples is the hands you are holding.

$K♥-K♠-9♠-8♠$

The value of this hand comes from having a high pair (flopping top set), the connectivity (flopping high straight draws) and the suitedness (having a King-high flush draw is much better than a nine-high flush). Holding a high pair and a high suit make this hand a good fit for a multiway pot and it should be called.

$10♦-10♥-9♥-8♠$

Although this hand is single-suited rather than trip-suited, the rank is lower, meaning that you are less likely to dominate your opponents in scenarios where you get a lot of money in on a board with a flush draw. Since you are "only" holding a ten-high suit, you are much more likely to be the dominated player yourself since you are facing a Broadway-heavy EP raising range. You are also less likely to flop overpairs or top sets. The connectivity of this hand is better than the previous hand, but this doesn't add enough EV to this hand to justify a call. Nuttiness is the essential factor in this situation because it is very likely that this hand will end up in a multiway pot. For those reasons, you should fold this hand versus an EP open-raise, even though you would open it yourself from any position.

3-Betting MP Versus EP

When it comes to 3-betting, the rank of the pair is much less important when compared to calling. When you call pre flop from middle position, you can expect to play multiway pots. High pairs do better in multiway pots because they are more nudded, so you are more likely to win big pots postflop with high pairs because you can dominate your opponents. In 3-bet pots, “smoothness” is more important because you want to be able to get the money in on as many flops as possible when you are in a big 3-bet pot.

The optimal 3-bet frequency when in MP versus EP with Broadway pairs is close to 6%. If you paid attention in the RFI section of this category, you won't be surprised by the main 3-bet requirement of this category: without an Ace, you are never 3-betting MP versus EP with a Broadway pair.

In general, the Ace is a crucial card when it comes to 3-betting in PLO because it drastically reduces the chance that your opponent is holding Aces and you get 4-bet. Most 4-betting ranges are very focused on Aces, so you are usually in a nasty spot whenever you get 4-bet while holding a Broadway pair. To avoid this terrible outcome as much as possible, you should only 3-bet Broadway pairs from this position if you are holding an Ace alongside with your pair.

Another important aspect is suitedness. Rainbow hands should never be 3-bet by the middle position player. Double-suited Broadway pair combinations with an Ace should almost always be 3-bet. Again, Broadway pairs without an Ace should never be 3-bet in this situation, even when double-suited.

When it comes to 3-betting single-suited Broadway pairs, focus on hands that have a significant equity advantage or extremely good realizability. Again, having an Ace is a must when it comes to 3-betting in this scenario. An example of a hand that has a big equity advantage is $A\clubsuit-K\heartsuit-K\spadesuit-8\spadesuit$. This hand is also blocking Aces, has a high Broadway pair, and a King-high suit.

However, the difference between 3-betting and calling is slim for the single-suited hands in this category. Let's compare $A\spadesuit-K\clubsuit-K\heartsuit-2\spadesuit$ to $A\clubsuit-K\heartsuit-K\spadesuit-8\clubsuit$:

$A\spadesuit-K\clubsuit-K\heartsuit-2\spadesuit$ also has a big equity advantage versus the early position open raising range with the A-K-K combination and high suit. The difference is $A\spadesuit-K\clubsuit-K\heartsuit-2\spadesuit$ is a great hand for multiway situations as it can make wheel straights. The suited Ace alongside the Kings make this hand very nudded. Calling becomes more profitable than 3-betting. Remember we're always com-

paring strategic options in poker and choosing the one with the highest EV. Whoever is right more often will win.

Another example of a hand that should 3-bet is A♥-J♥-J♠-9♠, even though the Jack-high pair is a weak Broadway pair, having an Ace means you are less likely to get 4-bet. The connectivity is quite good, and the double-suitedness to the Ace and the Jack adds even more value to this hand. Importantly, this combination flops smoothly as there are a lot of favorable flops for this hand. Therefore 3-betting is the way to go.

As either you or the open-raiser starts to get closer to the Button, you can widen up your Broadway pair value range, and you can begin to 3-bet some of the best double-suited and connected hands that don't hold an Ace. The way you want to widen your range is by focusing on suitedness and connectivity, and not the rank of the pair.

04

Big Blind Versus One Opponent

BB Versus EP

The Big Blind can call (50%), and 3-bet (8%) with this category against an EP open-raise. Keep in mind that the lower the pair, the higher the folding frequency. Kings only fold about 3% while tens fold about 50%.

The EP open-raising range includes a lot of high Broadway pairs, which means many hands that include two Jacks or tens that the Big Blind can be holding are easily dominated.

When it comes to 3-betting, you still often need an Ace, or for your hand to score very well on realizability. An example of a hand that should 3-bet against an early position open-raise without an Ace is J♥-10♥-10♠-9♠. This hand flops very smooth, which makes this combination a good fit for playing 3-bet pots. In case your opponent 4-bets you preflop, this hand can still call.

BB Versus Button

The Button raising range is much wider and much more diverse compared to the EP open-raising range. The Big Blind can profitably play 100% of hands from this category. Being dominated while holding a Broadway pair is no longer a big worry because the Button is not as focused on high cards as the EP player is. The Button also opens a lot of low pairs, and all the Broadway pairs are doing very well against this part of the Button's open-raising range.

Because of the ability to dominate the Button's range, the Big Blind should 3-bet with about 25% of all Broadway pairs. Again, it's usually the higher pairs that should 3-bet, specifically 47% of all Kings compared to 11% of all tens. Besides the rank of the pair, the standard 3-betting requirements still apply, e.g. blocking Aces, having good connectivity and good suitedness are all critical factors when you are considering whether to 3-bet or call. The difference is that when you are holding tens, you need stronger representation in these components compared to when you are holding Kings. Two examples are:

K♥-K♠-5♥-3♠

This hand should be 3-bet BB versus Button because it has a significant equity advantage against the Button open raising range, and good suitedness with two King-high suits. The connectivity of this hand is marginal, but overall the realizability that this hand offers in a 3-bet pot is high. Because of the high pair and flush draw, you can dominate your opponent's pair plus draw and stack them.

10♠-10♥-6♥-5♠

This hand has better connectivity than the previous one. However, the rank of the pair is much lower, so you have less chance to dominate your opponent postflop. It's harder to run into a weaker flush, set or flop an overpair. The equity advantage of this hand is much less compared to the previous hand and therefore this hand should just be called from the Big Blind.

BB Versus Two Opponents (BB Versus Button and MP)

The Big Blind should rarely fold a Broadway pocket pair against two opponents. You only fold 13.5% of the hands from this category. In multiway pots, nuttiness becomes more important, and, with Broadway pairs, the Big Blind gets an excellent price to try and flop a high set or high flush or straight draw. Fold the weakest Broadway pairs and call the rest. Just remember, you should still be willing to let your hand go on the flop against a bet if you only flop a weak overpair in a multiway pot.

The Big Blind should squeeze about 15% of the time versus Button and MP with Broadway pairs. By far, the best hands to squeeze with are Kings. About 35% of Kings should be played this way.

Flop C-bet OOP Strategy (Cutoff Versus Button)

Introduction

In this chapter, we will be examining the play in single-raised pots, playing OOP, as the preflop aggressor. We will be comparing OOP strategies to those discussed in the previous chapter (flop c-betting when playing IP) by analyzing some of the same boards. This will help you to understand how having positional advantage (or disadvantage) impacts on your play.

In the following examples, assume that you raised from the Cutoff and were called by the Button with both blinds folding. So, you are now playing OOP with a high SPR.

Sizing

The standard bet-sizings you should use OOP are the same ones as IP. Again, the bet-sizings are guidelines and don't depend on the position you are in. They mainly depend on the structure of the board (*Diagram 29*).

Board Texture	Sizing
Unpaired	75%
Straight	50%
Monotone	50%
Paired	33%

Diagram 29

C-bet Sizings for Single-raised Pots

07

C-bet Frequency

Let's look at four different boards and see how often you should be c-betting on these boards when OOP.

- ◆ On $K\spadesuit-6\diamondsuit-5\spadesuit$, the c-bet frequency is 7.5%.
- ◆ On $10\spadesuit-8\diamondsuit-8\clubsuit$, the c-bet frequency is 11%.
- ◆ On $8\spadesuit-7\diamondsuit-6\clubsuit$, the c-bet frequency is 15%.
- ◆ On $9\spadesuit-8\spadesuit-2\spadesuit$, the c-bet frequency is 12.5%.

The first thing that might strike you is how infrequently the OOP player

is c-betting. Let's recap the reasons for this. Single-raised heads-up pots with high SPRs maximize the positional disadvantage of the OOP player. You usually won't have a significant equity or a polarity advantage, meaning the equity and polarity between the Cutoff and the Button preflop ranges run very close on most boards.

Many players overestimate how much of an equity advantage they have when playing an "uncapped preflop range". They tend to think, "Well, given that the Button didn't 3-bet, I must have an equity advantage."

On many boards, you are running into a 50/50 split when it comes to equities and even the polarity distribution is often approximately even. The OOP player therefore ends up checking a lot because of the positional disadvantage both now and on future streets.

It is only when the preflop range of the OOP player is a lot stronger than the caller's range and the board texture is very favorable, that the OOP player starts to c-bet at a relatively high frequency. An example would be an Ace-high board when you raise from EP and the Button calls. On this board, the OOP player has a bigger polarity advantage because they have a lot of top set combinations, whereas the Button has almost none.

A further reason why you check OOP is that you are also incentivized to play many of your very strong hands as a check-raise rather than a c-bet. As in many preflop spots, you want to lower the SPR and play a two-street game instead of a three-street game when possible.

Another question you might ask when considering flop c-bet frequencies is, "Can't we just simplify our strategy and check our full range?" Although you should check most hands, by checking your full range you would be leaving a lot of money on the table. You still have specific hands with key blockers which should be c-bet because the expectation of betting is much higher when compared to checking.

Once again, it is all about understanding principles. On some boards, the bet frequencies are very low. For example, on $10\spadesuit-8\diamond-8\clubsuit$, you are c-betting only 11%. However, within this range, there are some hands that are c-betting at a very high frequency and you should learn these patterns so you can identify when you should go ahead and c-bet.

Analysis

In this section we are going to work with strength buckets. Strength buckets are categories or groups of hands that have similar strength or blockers. For example, top set is a common bucket to investigate. We group hands into buckets to compare them to different buckets. We can then breakdown and analyze betting patterns and validate our hypotheses about how the game works.

Let's consider the first flop $K\spadesuit-6\heartsuit-5\spadesuit$. As mentioned before, you have a very low c-betting frequency on this flop. This means most strength buckets are starting with a check with the intention of moving to either a check-call line or a check-raising line, depending on their equity and future street playability.

Top Set on $K\spadesuit-6\heartsuit-5\spadesuit$

With a set of Kings, you are c-betting 10% of the time and checking the rest. When you check, you check-call about 40% and check-raise 60%. Considering that you are holding the nuts, the check-raising frequency is relatively low. That's because the board is still very draw heavy and that typically increases the OOP player's disadvantage because there are more potential texture shifts that can occur. Therefore, it will be more profitable for you to sometimes play with a check-call rather than a check-raise. Let's look at some specific examples:

Hand Example 18

You are in the Cutoff with $A\spadesuit-9\heartsuit-K\heartsuit-K\heartsuit$ (Diagram 30).

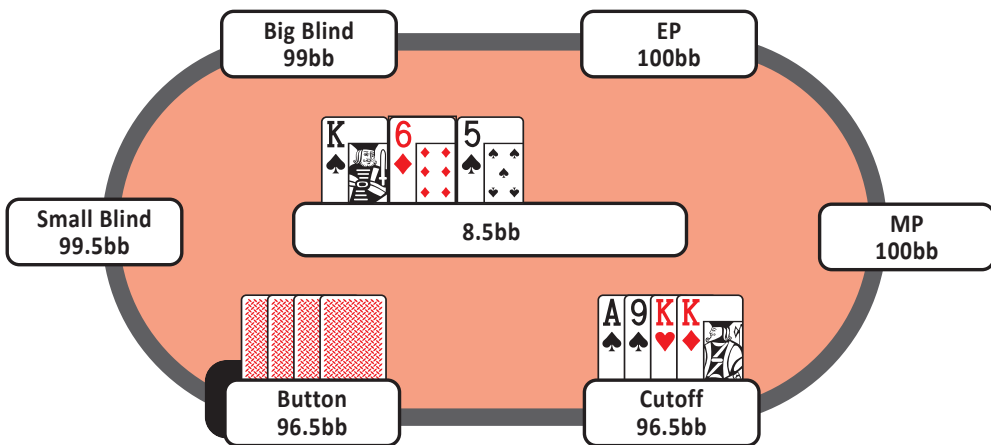


Diagram 30

With the nut flush draw and a strong made hand, you have all the incentive you need to inflate the pot as much as possible. The challenge is figuring out what the best course of action is to achieve this. Preferably, you would like to get in a check-raise. However, you must consider how likely you are to face a bet from the IP player and how often they will be able to continue after such aggression? As you are blocking the strongest hands and draws, you are removing your opponent's most likely c-betting and continuing hands. Therefore, you are better off by c-betting.

Hand Example 19

You are in the Cutoff with $K♥-K♣-J♠-10♠$ (Diagram 31).

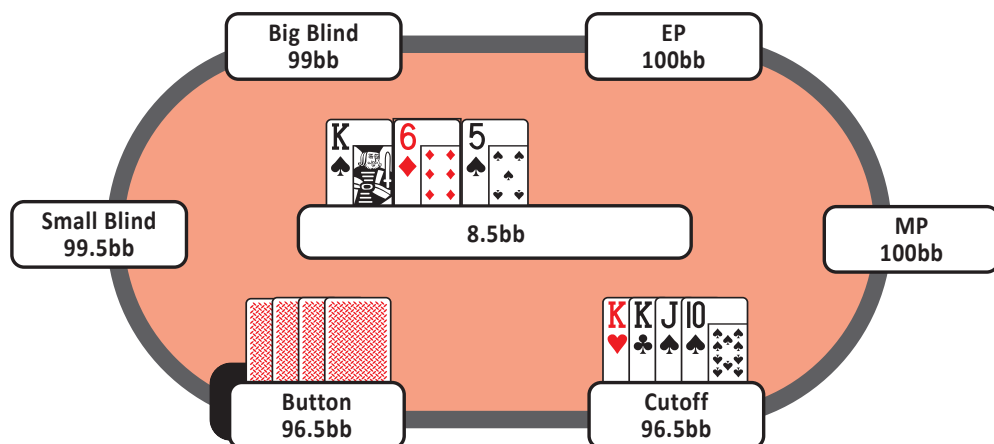


Diagram 31

Here you don't block the nut flush draw or any straightening cards, so your opponent is more likely to wake up with a hand such as a wrap or a nut flush draw which would most likely get bet. With a hand such as this, you should go for a check-raise.

Hand Example 20

You are in the Cutoff with $K♦-K♣-10♦-9♥$ (Diagram 32).

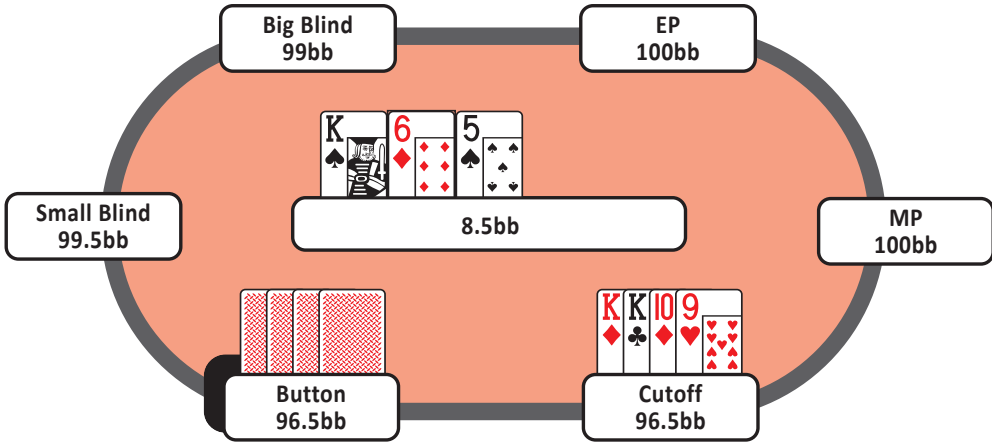


Diagram 32

This hand has less playability but you still have a backdoor flush draw and backdoor straight opportunities. Also, you are unblocking spade draws that can call a bet. This hand can be played either by betting or check-raising.

Hand Example 21

You are in the Cutoff with K♣-K♥-2♣-2♥ (Diagram 33).

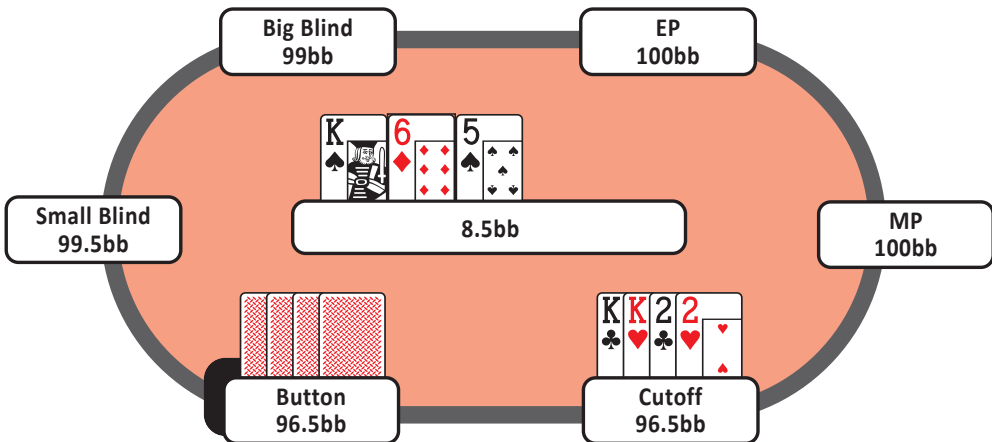


Diagram 33

This hand is going to fare much worse when facing a call on the flop and playing at high SPR on the turn and the river. Unlike the previous hand, you

have no flush draw or straight draw possibility. You are also not blocking any draws your opponent could bet on the flop. Therefore, this hand is more suitable to play for a check-raise. You are better off by getting the money in on the flop or by reducing the SPR significantly or getting your opponent to fold their equity.

Hand Example 22

You are in the Cutoff with $A♥-K♣-K♦-6♠$ (Diagram 34).

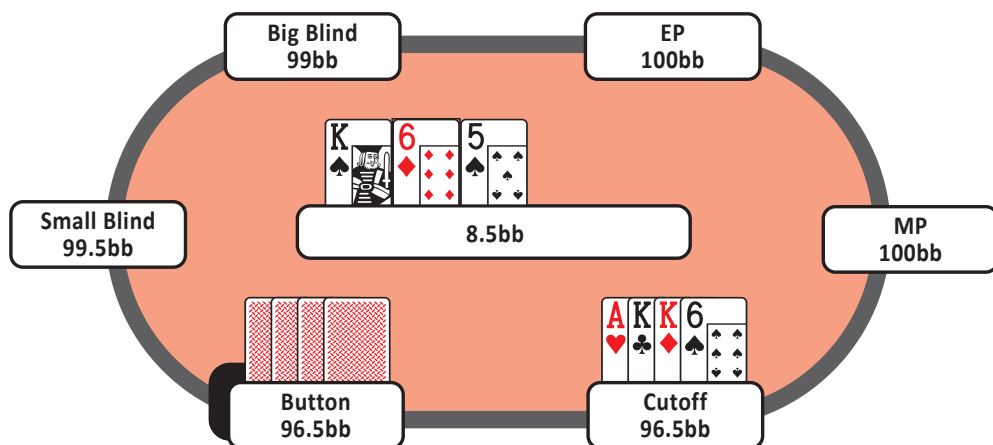


Diagram 34

Here, you have top set but very poor backup. You are not holding a backdoor flush draw or straight draw or a future flush blocker. Also, you are blocking your own full house outs. This hand has the least amount of equity when you are check-raising compared to other combinations. Also, it doesn't have great playability. Therefore, this hand should go into the check-calling range.

Hand Example 23

You are in the Cutoff with $K♦-K♣-4♦-3♣$ (Diagram 35).

Here you have top set, an open-ended straight draw and a backdoor flush draw. At the same time, you are not blocking 7-8-9 and you are not blocking spades. Given the decent turn playability and unblocking of your opponent's flop range, this is a good candidate to play for a check-raise.