
Foreword

Since the beginning of the new millennium poker has experienced an unprecedented boom, triggered by the invention of the in-table camera that makes it possible for the TV viewer to see the hole cards. Before the use of the 'mini-cams' poker was only rarely shown on TV.

Poker is a complex game but if you can see everybody's hole cards it becomes mostly trivial. Therefore, after having watched several poker episodes many viewers fall victim to the mistake that they are now experts. Then they flock to the card rooms and a rude awakening awaits them.

I like to watch poker on TV but I regard it as what it is: entertainment. That's why the TV stations air poker. They don't want to improve your poker skills; they want to entertain you. If you watch poker on TV for this reason, that's fine, but you are misguided if you think it will help your game. The truth is, no matter how often you watch these poker shows, it will not make you a top player, and not even a good one.

There are two main reasons why what you see on TV will not help your game. First, playing poker without seeing everyone's hole cards is a completely different game. Second, what is shown on TV is of very little relevance to most people's play.

Most poker shows are from large-tournament play. When the World Series

Professional Middle Limit Hold'em

of Poker started in 1970 there were six entrants, all of them top professional poker players. Today the major tournaments have thousands of entrants. Those that make it to the final table are not necessarily the best, but are often the luckiest players. The thousands of hands captured are edited so only the most interesting hands are shown¹—and, certainly, the hands aren't chosen for their instructive value.

The TV networks now show high-stakes cash games as well. It's definitively interesting to see a player raising \$100,000, but there are a couple of things to consider. Only a few players have the wherewithal to play in a \$300-\$600-\$1,200 no-limit hold'em game. Besides the fact that the players are paid to participate, for most of them being in front of the camera is a huge boost both to their ego and to their degree of fame. Thus, their market value goes up and they can negotiate even more lucrative commercial agreements.

The producers of these high-stakes poker shows are not interested in showing how poker is played on an expert level; what they want is a lot of action to attract viewers. So the producers always make sure that there are some loose-aggressive players like Daniel Negreanu, Sammy Farha, Gus Hansen or Mike Matusow at the table. If everyone played like Doyle Brunson or Barry Greenstein, there wouldn't be much of a game. Hence, what you see on TV bears scant resemblance to a real high-stakes game and even less to the poker game at which the average player sits.

One of the attractions of hold'em poker is that, on the surface, it's a very simple game. There are no complex rules or procedures, and anyone who has ever seen a deck of cards can understand how the game is played in about five minutes. Though the rules are simple and the players' options are limited (check, fold, call and raise), poker is not easy to master. It takes time, dedication and the will to learn. If you have the desire to improve your game, then this book can help you. Its purpose is twofold: to show you how winning middle-limit hold'em is really played and to help you to reflect on some concepts and strategies in poker.

The first part of the book shows you every hand I played for one week in a \$30-60 limit hold'em game in Las Vegas, Nevada, against a variety of

¹ For instance, in 2006 Chip Reese and Andy Bloch battled seven hours heads-up for the inaugural World Series of Poker H.O.R.S.E. title. Only a couple of hands were shown on TV.

players whose skill ranged from negligible to considerable. Nothing has been altered, cut or manipulated. You see the hands as I played them. (The names of most players have been changed to protect their identities.)

The second part discusses some selected theoretical and practical aspects of the game. An important emphasis is on the crucial difference between low- and middle-limit games. Few of us will ever play in the ultra-high-stakes games as seen on TV. However, to move up to middle limits is a realistic goal. Therefore, I outline the characteristics of middle-limit games, and I explain how they differ from the low limits and what it takes to be successful at these games.

This book is not for beginners. It will not explain how the game is played and will not teach you elementary poker principles. It's assumed that the reader has some playing experience and some basic understanding of the game. If you have trouble with the rules, or you don't understand position, outs and pot odds, then you should read one of the many introductory hold'em books first².

Two types of readers will profit most from this book. First there are the low-limit players intending to make the transition to middle-limit games, and second are the middle-limit players struggling to beat the game.

Although I had been thinking of writing this book for a while, it was Lewis Lorton (Columbia, Maryland, USA) who finally pushed me towards writing it. This book would not have been possible without the time he spent reading and commenting on its various iterations. His responses helped me to present my thoughts and ideas more clearly and compellingly, for which I am deeply grateful.

² A good starting point is Byron Jacobs, *Beginner's Guide to Limit Hold'em*, D&B Publishing 2005.