

Other Books From Two Plus Two Publishing

**Gambling For a Living** by David Sklansky and Mason Malmuth is the ultimate book for anyone interested in making a living at the gaming tables. The book includes chapters on horse racing, slot and poker machines, blackjack, poker, sports betting, and casino tournaments. It is designed to show anyone new to this field how to be successful and what it takes to become a professional gambler.

**Hold 'em Poker for Advanced Players** by David Sklansky and Mason Malmuth is the definitive work on this very complicated game. Some of the ideas discussed include play on the first two cards, semi-bluffing, the free card, inducing bluffs, being beaten on the river, staying with a draw, playing when a pair flops, playing trash hands, fourth street play, playing in loose games, and playing short-handed.

**Seven-Card Stud for Advanced Players** by David Sklansky, Mason Malmuth, and Ray Zee is the definitive work on this extremely complex game. Some of the ideas discussed include the cards that are out, ante stealing, playing big pairs, reraising the possible bigger pair, playing little and medium pairs, playing three flushes, playing three straights, playing weak hands, fourth street, pairing your door card on fourth street, fifth street, sixth street, seventh street, defending against the possible ante steal, playing against a paired door card, continuing with a draw, scare card strategy, buying the free card on fourth street, playing in loose games, and playing short-handed.

**High-Low-Split Poker, Seven-Card Stud and Omaha Eight-or-Better for Advanced Players** by Ray Zee is the third book in the "For Advanced Players" series. Some of the ideas discussed in the seven-card stud eight-or-better section include starting hands, disguising your hand, when an ace raises, fourth street, fifth street, sixth street, seventh street, position, bluffing, staying to the end, and scare cards. Some of the ideas discussed in the Omaha eight-or-better section include general concepts, position, low hands, high hands, your starting hand, play on the flop, multi-way versus short-handed play, scare cards, getting counterfeited, and your playing style.

**Tournament Poker for Advanced Players** by David Sklansky is the definitive text on tournament strategies which only a small number of players have mastered. Some of the ideas discussed include the effect of going broke, The Gap Concept, how chips change value, adjusting strategy because the stakes rise, all-in strategy, the last table, making deals, and The "System."

**Harrington on Hold 'em: Expert Strategy for No Limit Tournaments; Volume II: The Endgame** by Dan Harrington and Bill Robertie covers the final stages of no-limit tournaments. Topics include making moves, inflection points, the M and Q ratios, endgame play with multiple inflection points, short-handed tables, and heads-up play.

**Getting Started in Hold 'em** by Ed Miller is the best first book on hold 'em. It prepares a new student perfectly for more advanced texts. Covering the rules of the game, limit, no limit, and tournament hold 'em, it teaches all the fundamental concepts necessary to start winning right away.

**Small Stakes Hold 'em; Winning Big With Expert Play** by Ed Miller, David Sklansky, and Mason Malmuth teaches you to win the maximum in today's small stakes games. It covers theoretical topics such as implied odds and pot equity as well as strategic concepts such as protecting your hand, waiting for the turn, going for overcalls, and betting marginal hands for value. If your opponents play too many hands and go too far with them, this book is for you.

**The Theory of Poker** by David Sklansky discusses theories and concepts applicable to nearly every variation of the game. The book includes chapters on deception, the bluff, raising, slowplaying, position, psychology, heads-up play, game theory, and implied odds. In many ways, this is the best book ever written on poker.

**Hold 'em Poker** by David Sklansky is must reading for anyone planning to play anyplace that hold 'em is offered. Covers the importance of position, the first two cards, the key "flops," how to read hands, and general strategy. This was the first accurate book on hold 'em and has now been updated for today's double blind structure.

**Getting The Best of It** by David Sklansky contains six sections discussing probability, poker, blackjack, other casino games, sports betting, and general gambling concepts. This book contains some of the most sophisticated gambling ideas that have ever been put into print.

Part II  
44, 24, 27, 55, 38, 51, 40, 41, 12, 55, 47, 10  
113, 120, 113, 125, 117, 12, 55, 47, 10, 12

# Harrington on Hold 'em

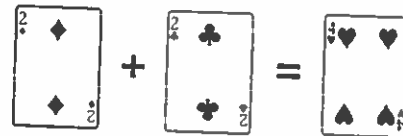
## Expert Strategy for No-Limit Tournaments Volume I: Strategic Play

By

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## 148 Part Four: Pot Odds and Hand Analysis

it. Remember that ace-king is a good starting hand, but it will need to improve along the way to win; with no improvement, it's just an Ace-high hand.

In online tournaments, the players, being relatively new to poker, are looser and tend to call larger bets than they would in live play, so you can make bigger bets and expect to get called. I'd certainly want to make a bet at the high end of my normal range.

**Action:** You raise to \$50. Players D, E, F, and G all fold. Player H calls. The blinds fold. The pot is now \$115.

**Flop:** J♦7♣4♥

**Question:** You're first to act. *What do you do?*

**Answer:** Given that you didn't hit your hand, that's a relatively good flop for you. No flushes, and no obvious straights. You now have to bet to find out where you stand. At a live tournament, you should lead out with a bet of about half the pot. Online, you have to bet a little more to achieve the same effect, perhaps about two-thirds of the pot.

**Action:** You bet \$80. Player H raises to \$160. The pot is now \$355. *What do you do?*

**Answer:** Your opponent has put the question to you, and you must answer. Let's quickly review what we know at this point:

1. It costs you \$80 to call a pot of \$355. Your pot odds are about 4.5-to-1.
2. To improve your hand on the very next turn, you have to catch one of the six remaining aces or kings. You've seen five cards so far, so there are 47 cards you haven't seen. Six of those are good for you, 41 are bad. Your

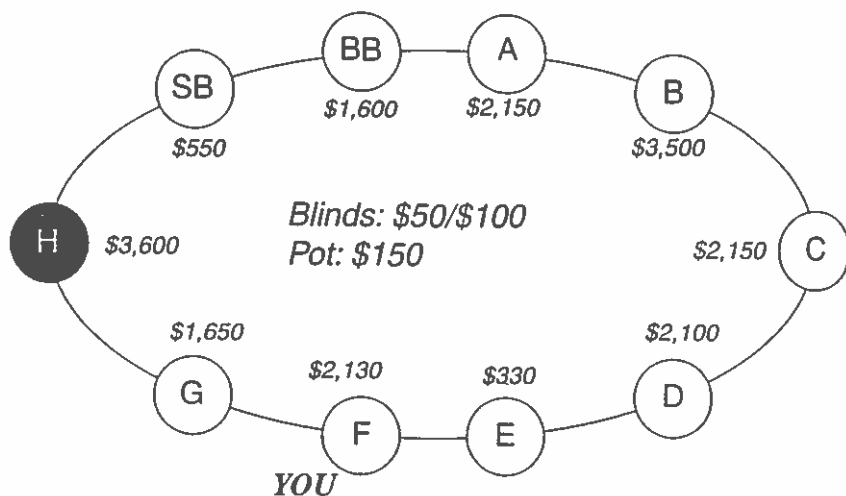
odds against improving on fourth street alone are about 7-to-1 against, much worse than your pot odds.

3. If you don't improve on fourth street, you'll usually face a bet that you won't be able to call. So it's mainly the odds of improving on the next card that you care about, not the odds that you might improve on fourth street and fifth street combined. (Those odds are about 3-to-1 against.)
4. Your opponent might be bluffing.
5. Your opponent might have flopped a set, so you can't win even if you hit. He might also have a holding like ace-jack or king-jack, which beats you now and negates some of your out cards.

Early in a tournament, and lacking any information on your opponent's style, you should probably assume that the chance he's bluffing roughly cancels out the chances that he has a hand you can't beat, and treat this directly as a pot odds problem. You're not getting the pot odds you need to call, so you're done with the hand.

**Action:** You fold.

## Hand 4-4



**Situation:** A few hours into a major tournament. The players are a mixed bag, but tend to be conservative. The small blind is a tight player who suffered a couple of bad beats about an hour ago.

**Your hand:** 5♥5♠

**Action to you:** Players A and B fold. Player C calls. Players D and E fold.

**Question:** *What's your play with this hand?*

**Answer:** A call here in good position is reasonable with a low pair. Your goal is to see a cheap flop and hit a set, after which you'll just need to figure out how to extract the most money from whoever is left. In addition, you may end up with position on your opponent, which might let you win the pot if you don't hit a set. If you don't hit your set and anyone shows strength, you'll need to beat a quick retreat.

**Action:** You call for \$100. The two players behind you fold, but the small blind goes all-in for his last \$500. The big blind and Player C now fold. The pot is \$850, and it costs you \$450 to call.

**Question:** *What's your action?*

**Answer:** The pot is now offering you slightly less than 2-to-1 odds on your money. Before you just shove your chips automatically into the pot, let's see if we can't do some simple calculations that might tell us if your call is clearly correct or not.

First question: What hands might your opponent have gone all-in with? We noted that the small blind was a tight player. We also noted that he lost most of his chips an hour ago, after which presumably he's been sitting tight and waiting for an opening. Although he's short on chips, he doesn't need to be desperate. He has enough chips to survive three more rounds, and since he's the small blind this hand, he won't need to put up any chips at all for the next eight hands. So we can dismiss the idea that this is just a desperate all-in bet with a couple of random cards. You're probably facing a pair higher than yours, or a couple of high cards.

If you're up against a high pair, it's a disaster, since you're 4.5-to-1 underdog in that situation. However, there are just nine pairs higher than yours, and six ways of drawing each pair, for a total of 54 possible hands.

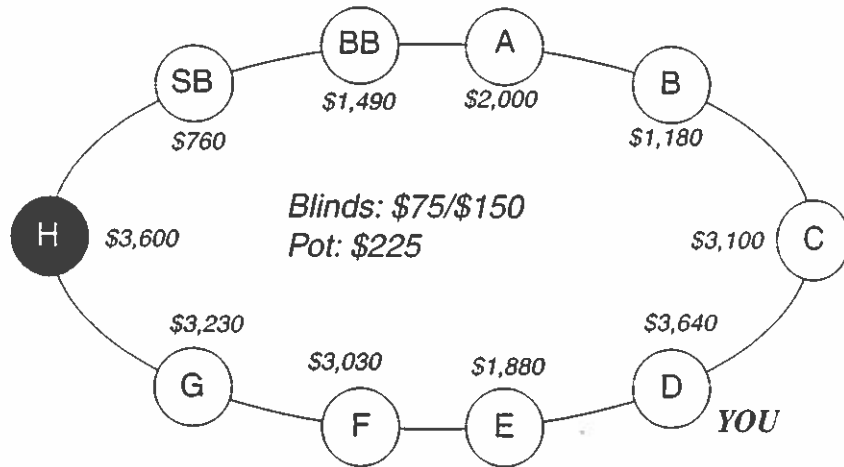
If you're up against two higher cards, you're quite happy, since you're a slight favorite in the hand and you're getting almost 2-to-1 on your money. How many such hands are there? There are 16 different ways to construct a hand like ace-king (12 unsuited, 4 suited), and if you assume he would raise with any two cards above a ten, but not otherwise (pretty safe assumption for a tight player), then you're up against a total of 6 different unpaired hands (AK, AQ, AJ, KQ, KJ, and QJ), with 16 ways of drawing each one, for a total of 96 hands.

Let's assume that our tight opponent won't raise with any hand weaker than these. Of these 150 hands, how many can you win? You'll win about 10 of the 54 times he has a higher pair. You'll be a small favorite against the 96 unpaired hands, so let's say you win 52 of those. The total looks like 62 wins and 88 losses, not a bad result when you're getting 2-to-1 on your money. So you call.

Against a loose player, the call would be even easier, since you could guess that he would go all in with some hands like 22, 33, 44, A2, A3, A4, all of which would leave you a big favorite.

**Resolution:** You call, and your opponent turns over Q♥Q♦. He wins the hand.

### Hand 4-5



**Situation:** A major tournament, in the middle of the first day. You're the chip leader at a generally tight table.

**Your hand:** 5♠5♥

**Action to you:** Player A folds, B calls, and C folds. Pot now \$375.

**Question:** *Raise, call, or fold?*

**Answer:** You call as in the previous hand. A small pair is worth a call at this point, although a lot of action behind you will force you to throw the hand away.

**Action:** Players E and F fold. Players G and H (the big stack on the button) call. The small blind goes all-in for his remaining \$685. The big blind folds, as does the original caller, Player B. The pot is now \$1,510. It costs you \$610 to call.

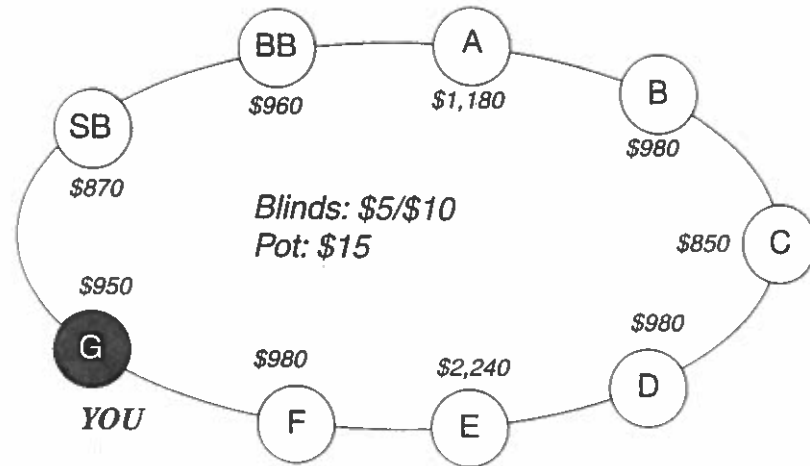
**Question:** *Raise, call, or fold?*

**Answer:** If there were no other active players in the pot, this would be an easy call based on the pot odds, as we saw in our last example. But the presence of two live players with big stacks behind you changes everything. If you call, either one could raise and make you throw your now-expensive hand away. If you don't make your hand on the flop, you won't be able to stick around for fourth and fifth street unless the hand is checked around, which is unlikely.

Always remember that the presence of active players behind you has a huge effect on your decision-making. Their presence makes many hands unplayable which are trivially easy calls in a one-on-one situation.

**Resolution:** You fold.

### Hand 4-6



**Situation:** First round of an online tournament.

**Your hand:** Q♥Q♦

**Action to you:** Player A calls \$10. Player B raises to \$40. Player C folds. Players D and E call \$40. Player F folds. Pot is \$145.

**Question:** What's your play?

**Answer:** This is the sort of action you like to see when you have a pair of queens on the button. The other players are building the pot for you, and the action is fast and furious. You should stick in a good-sized raise, about \$200, and see what happens.

There is a school of thought that advises just calling with the queens here, trying to see a flop, then making a move if no ace or king shows. It's not an unreasonable idea, and I've played that way myself on occasion. But my normal play is to raise.

**Action:** You raise to \$200. The blinds fold. Player A folds. Player B puts in \$160 to call, and Player D folds. Player E goes all-in for \$2,200. The main pot is now \$1,255, and it costs you \$750 to call. (There's also \$30 in a potential side pot between B and E, in which you will not be involved.)

**Question:** Call or fold?

**Answer:** If B folds and the main pot stays as it is, you're being offered 5-to-3 odds to call. If B gets in as well, the pot will be just over \$2,000 and you'll be getting 8-to-3 odds.

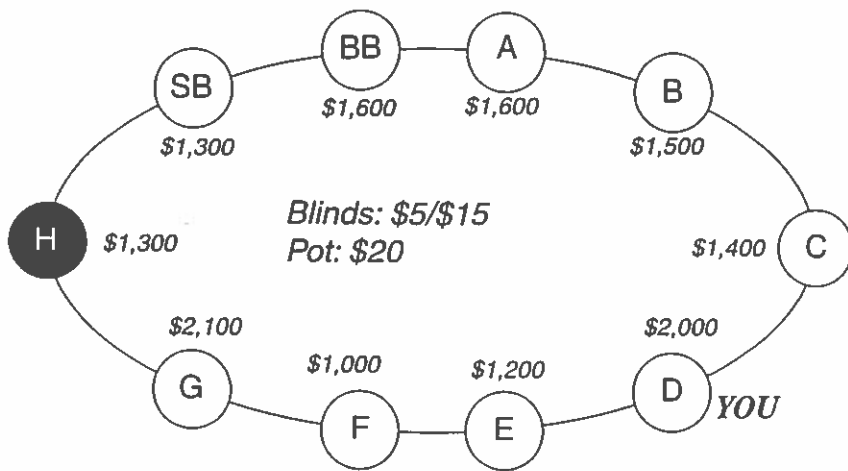
Your first job is to make some guesses as to what Player E has. There are four possibilities:

1. He has aces or kings. Now you're about a 4.5-to-1 underdog, and you're not getting the odds you need to call.
2. He has ace-king. You're actually an 11-to-10 favorite, so the pot odds are very favorable.
3. He has a lower pair, something like jacks or tens. Now you're a 4.5-to-1 favorite, and you're getting odds besides!
4. He's bluffing, or playing something pathetic like ace-jack suited. Again, you're a huge favorite.

So unless you're sure, for some reason, that he's really holding aces or kings, the other three cases are so favorable that, on balance, you have to call. Keep in mind, also, that in online poker people are much more likely to shove all their chips in the pot with nothing, or just a low pair, than in live poker. That's just another reason to call, so call.

**Action:** You call, and so does Player B. Both players turn over ace-king, making you about a 2-to-1 favorite overall since their hands now interfere with each other, and your two queens help block their long-shot straight. The board comes Q♣T♠9♥8♠5♦, and you triple your chips.

### Hand 4-7



**Situation:** First hour of a major tournament.

**Your hand:** Q♦J♦

**Action to you:** Player A calls. Player B folds. Player C calls. The pot has \$50.

**Question:** Do you fold, call, or raise?

**Answer:** Beginners get excited about this hand, but they shouldn't. Queen-jack suited isn't an awful hand, but if anyone out there has an ace, a king, or a pair, you're playing catch-up. This is a nice drawing hand that you're happy to play cheap, but you should be quite willing to let it go if the pot generates some serious action. Because the cards are

suited, you should be inclined to call here. With an unsuited queen-jack, you let the hand go after two early calls.

**Action:** In fact you raise to \$60.

Too loose. You're trying to steal a pot, probably figuring that your hand has plenty of potential if you get called. That's not a bad strategy in late position when no one has opened the pot, but right now you have six players behind you who haven't acted yet, plus the two callers in front of you, both of whom probably have better hands than you do. What you're actually doing here is building a pot where you're an underdog, definitely not a recommended strategy.

**Action:** Players E and F fold. Player G calls. Player H folds. The blinds fold. Players A and C fold. The pot is now \$170.

**Flop:** J♠4♦2♦

**Question:** What now?

**Answer:** You've had a mixed bag of good and bad news. The good news was that you forced out the callers in front of you. The bad news is that the player who called behind you often had you beaten. Remember, he saw two early callers plus a raise of four times the big blind, then he decided to call. That means he must have something, but probably not a premium pair, since he didn't reraise you. The flop is more good news, since you have top pair plus a flush draw.

You have to bet something here. You may well have the best hand, and you need to find out where you stand. I'd recommend you bet around two-thirds of the pot, say about \$120. That's enough to chase him out if he has nothing.

**Action:** You actually bet \$200, and Player G calls. The pot is now \$570.

## Fourth Street: 6♣

**Question:** *What now?*

**Answer:** You overbet the pot, and got called anyway. What does that tell you?

Your first conclusion should be that he's probably holding a jack. He didn't raise before the flop or after the flop, so a pair higher than jacks is pretty unlikely. He might have called before the flop with a pair of jacks, and now be slowplaying trip jacks. That's so unlikely you should pay off to it if that's really the case. And trip fours or deuces are similarly unlikely, because calling a big raise before the flop with those hands, and plenty of active players yet to act, is just too weird.

If he has a pair of jacks, what could his hand be? Queen-jack is the least likely possibility, because we have one of the queens. If he's holding king-jack or jack-ten, he should have folded before the flop. Likewise jack-x is very unlikely. That leaves ace-jack, suited or unsuited. I would have folded that hand before the flop, but lots of players would play it because of the ace.

How about a pair of tens, nines, or even something lower? He might have called with those before the flop. Would he keep calling against an overcard on the flop followed by a big bet? That's a pretty gutsy call, but a few players would do it. He might think that your overbet really showed weakness, and be calling based on that.

How about A♦K♦? That matches all his plays so far. The call before the flop makes sense, and after the flop he has two overcards plus a flush draw, for a total of 15 outs twice. (Three aces plus three kings plus nine diamonds, total of 15 cards.) He's a small favorite with 15 outs twice, so his call after the flop makes sense too.

Ace-king, ace-queen, or king-queen unsuited is a real stretch. He can call after the flop with that hand only if he's certain you're bluffing, and nobody's that certain.

So his most likely hands are ace-jack, which beats us, and A♦K♦ or similar hand, which is now an underdog after missing on fourth street. A bet of some kind looks necessary here. We can't let any flush draws have a free card. I'd bet about \$300, which doesn't give him a call if he does have the A♦K♦, a hand with only 12 outs.

**Action:** You actually check, and Player G checks.

## Fifth Street: 7♦

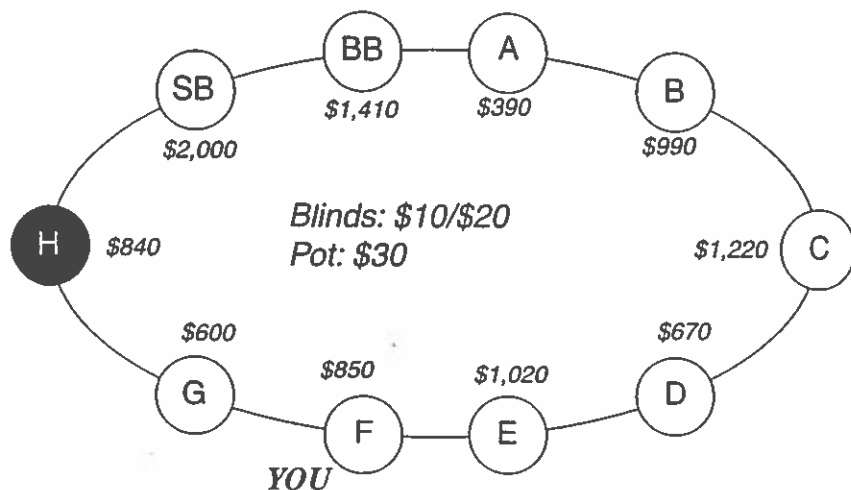
**Question:** *Now what?*

**Answer:** You have the flush, so you have to bet something. But without the ace or king of diamonds, you can't be completely confident. I'd bet about \$400 here. If my opponent comes back with an all-in raise, I'll have to think about throwing the hand away.

**Action:** You actually bet \$500, and Player G calls. He shows K♦8♦, and takes the pot.

Bad luck. Your opponent made bad calls everywhere and got rewarded for it. Just make sure you don't go on tilt when this scenario occurs. Be glad you're still alive in the tournament, because this guy sure won't be for very long.

## Hand 4-8



**Situation:** Early in a one-table satellite tournament.

**Your hand:** K♥K♦

**Action to you:** Players A and B fold. Player C calls \$20. Player D folds. Player E raises to \$40. There is now \$90 in the pot.

**Question:** Do you raise, and if so, how much?

**Answer:** You certainly want to raise a goodly amount, but not so much as to discourage action. A roughly pot-sized bet looks about right here.

**Action:** You raise to \$100. Players G and H and the small blind fold. The big blind calls for another \$80. Player C, the original caller, calls for another \$80. Player E, the original raiser, calls for another \$60. The pot now contains \$410. You will be last to act next round.

**Flop:** A♥6♦4♥

**Action:** The big blind checks, Player C bets \$20, and Player E calls. The pot is now \$450. *What do you do?*

**Answer:** It's good to get in the habit of recapping the action in your head before you make a move. The first thing to notice is that Player C has made a strange sequence of plays. He called the blinds in third position, then after a raise and a big raise behind him, he just called again. No hand that merited just limping in the pot could also justify calling two raises. So either he's making some sort of weird trap with a big hand, or he's a fish who doesn't know what he's doing.

You should be unhappy that you couldn't narrow the field more with your raise, but such things happen. (Make a mental note for the future that with this group, a bigger-than-normal raise is necessary.) The ace on the flop, however, is a big problem. With three callers, at least somebody should have an ace out there, so you've got to be very cautious. On the bright side, you have a back-door flush possibility, even though that's a real long shot. Right now, you're happy to just call and see a cheap card. Hopefully, the big blind won't do a check-raise.

**Action:** You call, and the big blind also calls. The pot is now \$490.

**Fourth Street:** J♥

**Action:** The big blind bets \$65, Player C calls, and Player E raises to \$130. The pot is now \$750. *What should you do?*

**Answer:** The jack seems to have helped this crowd, and everybody is saying they have something. What do you do? The first job is to assess your situation carefully.

There's some chance that you have the best hand right now. If no one had an ace, your kings are probably still good. The ace on the flop was scary, but the betting on the flop was



anemic, so there is some possibility that you don't need to improve to win.

If you do need to improve, it's time to start counting the cards that will improve your hand. The jack helped you here, because it's the fourth card to your nut flush. With no pair on the board, there are no full houses out there, so hitting the flush will certainly win the hand. Four flush cards accounted for gives you nine outs. The two outstanding kings might win the hand for you, but they might not; you could already be facing a flush. You can't count them as two outs — maybe one out is about right. That gives you 10 outs out of 46 cards. You're a 36-to-10 underdog, or about 3.5-to-1.

You have to put in \$130 to call this pot, and the pot has \$750 in it. That means the pot is offering you a tad less than 6-to-1. So far, it looks like calling is a no-brainer.

But there's some additional good and bad news to consider.

The bad news is that you're not guaranteed to see the river card for just \$130. The big blind and player C are still alive behind you. Neither has shown much this hand, so you're probably not going to see a raise out of them. But it could happen, and if it does your pot odds are wrecked.

The good news is that if you hit your flush on the end, you're going to win a lot of money. At least one and perhaps two of them will hit a flush at the same time, and whoever does might lose most of his chips. So your implied pot odds are huge. It's hard to quantify the good and bad news here, but on balance it still looks good for you. So call.

**Action:** You call. The big blind folds, and Player C calls. The pot is now \$945.

**Fifth Street:** 9♥

**Action:** Player C checks, and Player E bets \$20. *What's your play?*

**Answer:** Be calm. You've hit the flush, and since you have the king and the ace is on board, you have the nut flush. And since there's no pair on board, there are no full houses against you, so you have the lock hand. The beginner in this situation is so delighted with having won the hand that he just shoves all his chips in the middle of the pot. Resist this temptation. Your job now is to extract the most money from your opponents. How to do that is often a tricky problem.

Your first job is to check out the remaining stacks. Player C started with \$970 and now has \$720 left. Player E started with \$750 and now has \$480 left. You are down to an even \$600. By the way, this is a key skill to develop if you start out playing online poker and then move to live poker. You can't just look at the screen to gauge how many chips remain; you have to estimate it from the stack sizes. Don't worry — it's a skill that improves with practice.

The bad news here is the betting action so far. Player C only checked, and Player E bet \$20. With four hearts on board, this action indicates one of three things:

1. No one has a heart.
2. Someone has a heart, but they're afraid of a higher flush.
3. Someone has a heart and has decided to trap.

Case (3) is unlikely. It's foolish to check a flush after the last card, because of the danger that the hand simply gets checked down. Cases (1) and (2) are more reasonable. If it's Case (2), and you make a modest bet, the player with the flush will look you up. He might look you up even if you go all-in, although I've seen good players fold in that situation.

If Case (1) applies, even a modest bet may not get called here.

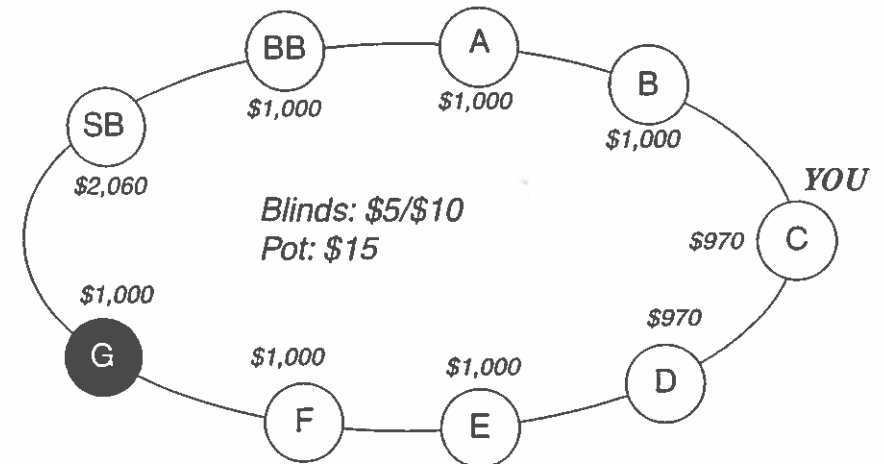
I like to think of a range of plausible bets, then shade my decision toward the top and bottom of the range, depending on whether my opponents have acted loose or tight. Here the right range looks like \$100-to-\$200. It's small enough so they're getting great pot odds to call, and it's also small enough so they'll have reasonable sized stacks left if they call and lose. In a situation like this, I definitely don't want to bet more than half of anyone's stack. Losing more than half your stack is a real psychological barrier, and I don't want to push anyone across that barrier. Seems like \$150 is about right. Players C and E seem a bit on the tight side, just from the action this hand, so this is probably the best you can do to pick up a few extra chips.

By the way, in online play you can be much more aggressive here. The rounds are so short, and players are under such pressure to accumulate chips quickly, that even an all-in bet has a reasonable chance to be called.

**Action:** You bet \$150, and Players C and E both fold. You take the pot.

*C'est la vie.* Don't waste any time second-guessing the size of your bet. Just take your chips and get on to the next hand. The time for second-guessing is after the tournament is over.

## Hand 4-9



**Situation:** Early in a single-table online tournament. You don't have any solid information about the other players.

**Your hand:** A♥K♠

**Action to you:** Player A calls, Player B folds. The pot is now \$25.

**Question:** *Do you call or raise?*

**Answer:** Your hand is certainly strong enough for a raise. Three, four, or five times the big blind would be a good amount.

**Action:** You raise to \$40. Player D folds. Player E calls. Players F and G fold. The small blind calls for \$35. The big blind folds. Player A puts in another \$30 to call. The pot is now \$170. There are four players in the pot, and you will be third to act after the flop.

**Flop:** K♣9♥3♣

**Action:** The small blind and Player A both check. *What should you do?*

**Answer:** You have top pair with top kicker, so you're in excellent shape. You're going to take the lead and bet. The only real question is: how much?

Your hand is quite strong, so you don't want to bet so much that everyone runs away. But there are two clubs on board, so you don't want to bet so little that the flush draws have the proper odds (including implied odds) to stick around. This is a very common situation after the flop, and the right bet is something in the range of three-quarters of the pot to a little more than the pot. In this case, you should consider betting between \$140 and \$200.

Keep in mind also that you can increase your bet depending on the number of players you're facing. Against a single opponent, choose a bet at the low end of your range. Against several opponents, pick an amount at the high end of the range. The more opponents, the greater the chance that someone will come in against you.

**Action:** You actually bet \$100. Player E calls. The big blind and Player A fold. The pot is now \$370.

You bet too little. If Player E is on a club flush draw, he got the proper pot odds to call.

**Fourth Street: K♦**

**Question:** *What should you bet now?*

**Answer:** With your trip kings, it looks like you'll win the hand easily unless he's on a flush draw and hits his flush on the end. You need to bet enough so that he's not getting the right odds to draw to his flush, but you also want to extract some more money in case he's chasing you with some lesser holding and is inclined to play. You both have much more

than the pot at this point — your chip count is \$830, his is \$860.

Against most opponents you should bet about \$250 here. To call, he would have to put in \$250 for a pot of \$620, about 2.5-to-1 odds. He's more than 4-to-1 to hit his flush, so it's a blunder for him to call if he knows what you have.

**Action:** You actually bet \$200, and he calls. The pot is now \$770. You have \$630 left, he has \$660.

**Fifth Street: J♣**

**Question:** Three clubs are now showing on board. *What do you do?*

**Answer:** Now you've reached a genuinely tough decision. Let's work through it and see what should go into your thinking in these situations.

The first question you should ask yourself is this: "If I check and he makes a substantial bet or goes all-in, will I throw away my trip kings?" If the answer to this question is no, then you should tend to bet now. By betting, you'll make some extra money when he calls with some hands that he wouldn't have bet if you had just checked. For example, if he was holding J♥9♥ to start, he wouldn't necessarily bet on the end, but he'd almost certainly call a bet by you. The same reasoning holds true if he's been playing hands like ace-jack or queen-jack, or even slowplaying aces or queens.

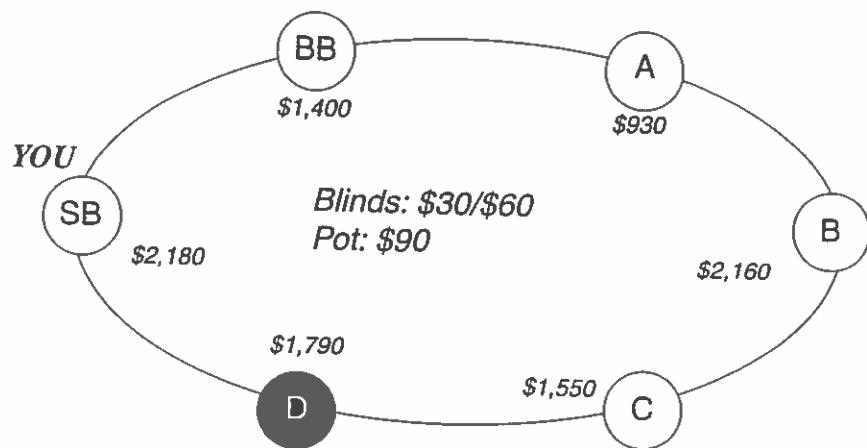
If you would throw your trip kings away after a bet, then you should tend to check now. In no-limit tournaments you don't throw these hands away. Your time is severely limited. The blinds keep crawling up behind you, and you have to keep accumulating chips to stay ahead of them. A set of kings against a possible flush is just too good a situation to throw away.

The real choice is between going all-in right now and betting something like \$200. The \$200 bet will win some more money from hands like a single pair that might have folded an all-in bet, and against stronger hands you will get all-in eventually anyhow. A bet like that would be my top choice, but it's a very tough judgment call.

**Action:** You actually go all-in and get called. Your opponent shows 8♠8♣ and loses to your trip kings.

In online poker, players are much more likely to play all the way with a low pair. When you make the move from online to live tournaments, be aware that in general your opponents will show down much stronger hands.

### Hand 4-10



**Situation:** Late in a single-table online tournament. Players B and D are very aggressive.

**Your hand:** 9♣2♣

**Action to you:** Player A folds. Player B calls. Player C folds. Player D calls. Pot is now \$210.

**Question:** Do you fold, call, or raise?

**Answer:** Obviously 9♣2♣ is so weak that you can just throw the hand away. But there are a couple of reasons why you might play a hand like this occasionally.

1. The first reason is simply to vary your play so that your opponents can't read you so easily.
2. The second and more important reason is to take advantage of the huge pot odds you're being offered in the small blind. You have to put in only \$30 to play a pot of \$210. Those 7-to-1 odds are quite compelling. Even a very weak hand has more chance than that if it can play to the end. Your 9♣2♣, for instance, is about 25 percent to win against two hands dealt at random. If the two hands contain a common high card, the winning chances rise to about 33 percent.

This is not the whole story, of course. The big blind hasn't acted yet, and he may chase you out with a raise. You're probably not facing random hands, but hands that are somewhat better than random. And those quoted winning chances are based on being able to play the hand down to the end. If you miss your hand on the flop and are then confronted with a big bet, you won't be getting the odds you need to continue playing. But there's no harm in playing a hand like this, occasionally, as a speculation. With those caveats in mind, you can call here.

**Action:** You elect to call for \$30. The big blind just checks. The pot is now \$240.

Flop: 5♦4♣3♣

**Question:** You're first to act. *What should you do?*

**Answer:** You should usually make a significant bet of about half the pot. You now have a decent hand, with a flush draw and an open-ended straight draw. The flop probably missed your opponents, who may all be sitting there with a couple of high cards. A good-sized bet here may win the pot right now, and you have plenty of outs if it doesn't.

**Action:** You bet \$120. The big blind and Player B call. Player D raises to \$240. The pot is now \$840. *What do you do now?*

**Answer:** Your first thought here should be to slow down and take some time, because you could be making a crucial decision. The pot is getting big, you're drawing at potentially monster hands, and this could be a pot where several players go broke. A lot of decisions in poker can be made quickly, but this isn't one of them.

You should be thinking about three things here:

1. **Pot Odds.** It costs you \$120 to call a pot of \$840. Those 7-to-1 odds look very good. The big blind and Player B are still able to act behind you, but you're still getting very good odds.
2. **Potential Outs.** You're drawing at a straight and a flush. Both are strong hands, but neither is guaranteed to win. If someone is out there with two clubs, one is likely to be higher than your 9♣. There are nine clubs still out, plus three aces (you can't double-count the A♣) and three sixes (don't double-count the 6♣), for a total of 15 potential outs. That's plenty of outs, given the pot odds you're offered.

3. **Your opponents.** You were called by two players and raised by a third, which was certainly unexpected given the nondescript flop. Players B and D are known to be aggressive, so you can discount their plays a bit, but not entirely. You might be facing a set of trips somewhere, but you might just be up against a pair. A made straight is unlikely; someone would need to be holding ace-deuce, or seven-six, or six-deuce, all unlikely hands to be playing before the flop.

Once you've reasoned this far, it's time to make a judgment. Given this set of facts, you should call. The pot odds are just too enticing given the number of potential outs. Calling is better than reraising because you would like to get in as cheaply as possible, and calling may draw in the two players behind you, improving your pot odds.

**Action:** You call. The big blind calls. Player B folds. The pot is now \$960.

**Fourth Street:** 9♠

**Question:** *What's your move now?*

**Answer:** You now have top pair on board, plus the straight and flush draws. With the pot at \$960, you should start looking at the remaining stacks. You have \$1,880 left, while the big blind has \$1,100 and Player D has \$1,490.

You should make a strong, pot-sized bet here. That's a large enough bet so that anyone who is drawing will not be getting the right odds to call. It also shows your opponents that they have to be willing to go all-in to play.

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**Action:** You in fact check. Player D bets \$500. *What do you do?*

**Answer:** You should call. You can't be sure about the quality of any of your outs, but you have so many of them that it's worth calling. The nine clubs are probably outs, the six additional aces and sixes that are not clubs are probably outs, and the two outstanding nines may be outs. There are 46 cards left in the deck and 17 of them may be outs for you. (Don't forget that you may not *need* any outs; your pair of nines could still be good here.) It costs you \$500 to see a pot of \$1,460, so you're being offered almost 3-to-1 odds. Take them.

**Action:** You call. The pot is now \$1,960.

**Fifth Street:** 6♣

**Question:** *How should you bet on the end?*

**Answer:** If Player D had a drawing hand, he certainly didn't bet like it. It's reasonable to assume your flush is now good, and you should go all-in.

**Action:** You go all-in and Player D calls. He shows 7♥6♥, and your flush beats his straight.

Player D should have bet a lot more on fourth street, so that any flush draws would not have had the proper odds to call. In all, however, an interesting hand.