

Watch this **FREE** 41
Minute Video - "How To
Win and Kick A** at Texas
Holdem Poker! [Go >>>](#)



My Secret

How to Play

WINNING POKER

By ALBERT H. MOREHEAD
Editor, *The Official Rules of Card Games*

LOS ANGELES
W.R. MATHEWS & SON

Copyright 1957 by

W. R. MATHEWS & SON
Publishers - Distributors
BOOKS • NOVELTIES • GAMES
1017 North La Cienga Blvd.
Los Angeles 46, California

Laws of Poker copyright 1946, 1957, by the U. S. Playing Card Company, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Excerpt from *How to be a Consistent Winner in the Most Popular Card Games*, by John R. Crawford, copyright 1953 by John R. Crawford, published by Doubleday & Co., New York.

Excerpts from *Oswald Jacoby on Poker*, by Oswald Jacoby, copyright 1947 by Doubleday & Co., New York.

Excerpts from *Culbertson's Card Games Complete*, by Ely Culbertson, Albert H. Morehead and Geoffrey Mott-Smith, copyright 1952 by The Greystone Press, New York.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

INTRODUCTION

In the course of this volume I say, "I have never read a bad book on poker." Some poker books give more information, some less, but every one of them passes along to the reader the experience of a first-class poker player who has worked out his own approach to winning play.

I have read every poker book that has come my way—literally dozens of them. From every book without exception I have learned something. I wish in this introduction to acknowledge my indebtedness to all the authors of all the poker books I have read, and to all the fine practical players from whom I have learned, but especially to the following:

OSWALD JACOBY, who is justly recognized as the standard authority. His book on poker is the classic. His skill as a practical player is famous.

GEORGE COFFIN, an outstanding contributor to the laws of poker, a great practical player.

JAMES WICKSTEAD, the pundit on stud poker, whose book on that game has helped thousands of poker players.

JOHN CRAWFORD, whose book (*How to Be a Consistent Winner in the Most Popular Card Games*) I quote in the pages that follow.

LOUIS A. LAWRENCE, another great player and writer, whose writings on poker have been especially informative on the game of "low-ball."

THE TWO OUTSTANDING PLAYERS AND WRITERS who choose to sign their books "Jack King" and "John Moss" respectively, and whose real names I would not dare reveal since they do not choose to do so themselves.

MAURICE ELLINGER, the great British authority, whose book is as justly celebrated in his own country as Jacoby's is in my country.

ELY CULBERTSON, my late close friend, who was as good at poker as at bridge.

THE ANCIENTS, including the old Scotsman R. F. Foster and all the others whose books started all of us poker writers on our way.

I wish also to thank my patron and publisher, William R. Mathews Sr., "the sole progenitor of this book," as Shakespeare would have said; I know he joins me in wishing you, the reader of this book, happy gaming and a few extra chips when the long day's over.

ALBERT MOREHEAD. New

York, 1957

CONTENTS

HISTORY AND DESCRIPTION OF POKER		PACK
About the game of poker	7	
Poker is a game of skill.....	8	
The laws of poker	9	
The forms of poker	11	
Draw poker.....	11	
Jackpots	11	
Straight draw poker	12	
Blind opening	12	
Stud poker	12	
Five-card stud	12	
Seven-card stud	13	
Freak or special games.....	13	
Lowball.....	13	
High-low poker	13	
Wild-card games	13	
Special hands	14	
FACTS APPLYING TO ALL FORMS OF POKER		
What you have to know.....	16	
Advice to all poker players.....	21	
Ethics and etiquette	21	
Just how important is mathematics?	23	
Psychology and bluffing	26	
Position	30	

	PAGE
Money management.....	32
Card memory and analysis.....	37

THE PRINCIPAL FORMS OF POKER

Draw poker	39
Jackpots	52
Straight draw poker	54
Blind opening	56
Lowball.....	59
The Bug.....	61
High-low poker	63
Deuces wild	64
Stud poker	66
Five-card stud	66
Seven-card stud	72
Seven-card high-low stud	74

LAWS OF POKER

General laws	76
Irregularities.....	81
Draw poker	85
Stud poker	87
Betting limits.....	90

POKER PROBABILITIES

Possible poker hands (original deal)	92
Blind opening draw poker	93
Lowball	95

ABOUT THE GAME OF POKER

Poker is called the American national game. (It shares this distinction with baseball.) Actually, poker comes as close to being international as any card game possibly could. It probably originated in Persia; it developed in Europe; it did attain its present form in the United States—probably in the 1830s—but today it is played in every country in which playing cards are known. Nevertheless, since poker reached those countries from the United States and since it is internationally known as our national game, every American as a point of patriotic pride should know how to play an acceptable game of poker.

No one knows surely *where* poker originated, *when* it originated, or how it got its name. The basic principle of poker is that the most unusual combination of cards is the winning hand. This is such an obvious basis for a game that there may have been ancestors of poker stretching back to the year 894 A.D., when playing cards were invented. (They were invented by the Chinese.) At least four hundred years ago the Persians had a game called *As Nas* in which there was a twenty-card deck, four players, five cards dealt to each, and betting on which player had the best hand. Since no cards were left over, there could be no draw; and the idea of stud poker had not yet been thought of. As early as the late 1600s, the Germans had a game that they called *pochen*, their word meaning to "bluff," or "to brag," and from this game developed the early English game *brag* and the French game *poque*. It cannot be proved but it is irresistibly plausible that our name *poker* derived from this French name *poque*.

Until the Louisiana Purchase, in the year 1803, New Orleans and the entire Mississippi River and its valley were French territory. The people spoke French and if they played card games they played French card games. After the Louisiana Purchase thousands of English-speaking citizens of the new United States poured into the territory and took over the city of New Orleans and the Mississippi Valley, but they could not help being influenced by the French customs and terms that they found there. So they adopted the French game *poque* but changed its name to the familiar English word *poker*. That, at least, is the logical assumption; and while no one can prove it, all poker historians have accepted it.

We are all familiar with the prototype (and stereotype) of the

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

Mississippi River steamboat game that arose sometime in the 1830s and prevailed at least until the Civil War. The rules were very simple. Each player was dealt five cards face down, and after the deal was finished everyone bet on whether or not he had the best hand. There was no limit and either of two customs governed the betting (it is hard, here, to differentiate between fact and legend): A man could bet anything he wanted to. His opponent, according to some stories, could always call ("have a sight") for as much money as he had with him; or, according to other stories, his opponent was always given twenty-four hours to raise the money required to call.

The entire history of poker since that time is the history of repeated efforts to pep up the game, to encourage players to stay in and to bet. Mathematically, a man playing straight poker (no draw) in a two-handed game should bet against his one opponent if he has some such hand as a pair of fives. Psychologically it doesn't work out that way. The hand just doesn't look good enough. So first the element of the draw was added, giving a venturesome player hope of improving when he wasn't dealt a good hand originally; then a few extra winning hands, such as the straight, were added; then the ante was added, so that there would always be something in the pot for a player to shoot for; then came wild cards, and then stud poker, and then freak games of all kinds, and now it has reached a point at which there are probably thousands of different games called poker. These games are all related yet no two are exactly alike. Therefore you can make few general statements that apply to all games; in fact, you can make few general statements that apply to even two or three games.

Poker is a Game of Skill

Since the earliest days of poker, people have made the mistake of considering it a gambling game. It seems to be a gambling game because it is usually played for money and in fact it is no good if it is not played for money. Nevertheless, poker is farther from a gambling game than almost any other card game you can think of, even contract bridge. Despite the fact that there are innumerable forms of poker and that the strategy differs in all of them, good players will almost always wind up winners and poor players will almost always wind up losers. As these pages unfold, I will give many bits of advice on how to be a skillful and winning player rather than a losing one,

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

but I can sum the whole principle up with my first bit of advice, which is as follows:

If you aren't beating the game, you are being outplayed. There is a reason why you lose, even if you can't figure it out.

Mathematically, all things are possible. Out of a hundred thousand players, there will be two or three good players who consistently hold bad cards and lose when they should win, and there will be two or three poor players (to balance them) who consistently hold good cards and win when they should lose. It is a form of self-deceit and a matter of flying in the face of probabilities to think you are one of the unlucky few if you are losing when you think you should be winning. For nearly all players, the cards do even up in the long run. They do not come out exactly even—that would be as unusual, over the course of a lifetime, as for a player always to have 10 percent the better of it—but they come close to even. Most players will hold somewhere between 48 percent and 52 percent of all the good cards they are entitled to. That creates a range of 4 percent. The minimum advantage of the good poker player over the poor poker player is 10 percent and in a game in which there is a wide disparity—as when one very good player plays with a bunch of total palookas—the advantage can be 25 percent or more. Therefore a consistent bad card holder (who gets only 48 percent of the good cards) will still have enough percentage in his favor to make him a winner. If he is a poor cardholder he may win a little less than he should, and if he is a good cardholder he may win a little more, but he will still win.

The conclusion is this: When you have read this book, and put into practice its precepts, and when you are convinced that you are playing the game as well as possible, then if you still lose your only recourse is to find a different game to play in, a game in which the other players are not quite so good.

The Laws of Poker

It has often been said that poker has no official laws. I have been guilty of making that statement myself. When I reconsider I realize that exactly the opposite is true. Poker has innumerable sets of official laws.

There is no disagreement about the laws of *correct* procedure. Everyone agrees on the rank of the cards, the order of play, the method of betting, etc.

The only disagreement is on irregularities and what should

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

be done about them. The ethics in a tough club game are entirely different from the ethics in a polite parlor game. If a player miscounts his chips and puts into the pot more than he should, a group of strangers might make him leave them in, a private men's club might slap on him a penalty of a chip or two, and a group of personal friends would let him withdraw the excess without any question whatsoever. If a player acts out of turn, a gambling house will let him get away with it because to inflict a penalty might offend the player and lose a customer; a group of his friends might penalize him in a good-natured way; a mixed group of husbands and wives in a family game probably would not even notice it.

If a man says he has filled a flush, bets, and then is found to be bluffing, in a family game he is considered a trifle dishonest; in a men's club he is considered to have played exactly according to the traditions of the game. To sandbag—to check and then raise when someone bets into you—is considered the essence of poker by the majority of serious players but so enrages most people that professional clubs have had to make a rule against it. In a tough game one can make the most outrageous statements about his hand and the practice is not only tolerated but is sneered at as being kid stuff that has no chance to fool anybody; but in the refined purlieus of a society living room it is considered a little less than nice. You can imagine what the general attitude would be in a game among experienced players if someone, before betting, asked, "I've forgotten—does a full house beat a flush?" But in the casual family game such a question is not too unusual and no one draws any particular conclusions from it. It would not even arouse any comment unless the woman who asked happened to hold neither a full house nor a flush, in which case she would probably be gossiped about as being a bit too smart for her own good.

In the game of poker these dilemmas are solved by the fact that every club, group, or even an individual social game has the right to make its own rules. The rules can be and are made so as to conform to the temper and preferences of the players in the game.

Nevertheless it is not only desirable but almost essential that such rules be written. Then, when any misunderstanding or question arises, the players can consult the written rules and stick by them, whatever they say, so that there can be no hard feelings.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

The poker laws in this book (page 76) are recommended for adoption by any game or group of players. These laws follow those adopted by principal clubs and gambling houses throughout the United States, and especially from Nevada westward. There are several other admirable codes of poker laws and from a practical standpoint it does not make a great deal of difference which code is adopted as long as the players adopt some code and stick by it.

Since a poker game is "every man for himself," poker players are by nature rugged individualists. A group of serious players seldom see why anyone else should be permitted to make laws for them. They prefer to make their own, or to at least look over the available remedies that have been tried and select the ones they like best. There is nothing wrong with this as long as every player in the game clearly understands what procedure will cover each particular case and as long as the laws are written so that there can be no misunderstandings about them.

THE FORMS OF POKER

As mentioned above, there are innumerable ways to play poker. All have some features in common, such as the rank of the hands and the basic fact that each hand eventually consists of five cards; all have their points of difference that affect not only the procedure of play but also the strategy of play. The selection of a game is not wholly a matter of taste. Some games are definitely more suitable to a particular group or a particular setting (such as a home or club) than other games. I will list the main subdivisions of the game and make some observations on their suitability for particular groups and occasions.

The main division of poker games is into two large classes: closed or draw poker, in which all cards are kept face down until the showdown; and open or stud poker, in which some cards are exposed to all players as the betting progresses.

Draw Poker

Jackpots—draw poker in which a pair of jacks or better are required to open. This game is usually played "pass and back in," that is, you can pass or check free before someone bets, and then come back into the pot. Jackpots is the standard form of draw poker played in homes and family groups, and it is proper that it should be. It is easier in such a game for a casual or inexperienced player to figure how good his hand is, because he is given a standard, the pair of jacks, as a starting point.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

Draw poker, open on anything, pass and out—that is, in every turn you must either bet (at least the minimum, the lowest bet permitted, or a call) or you must drop. This is the game most often preferred in places where games are conducted professionally. By a professional game I mean one that is conducted for the profit of the proprietor, who either cuts the pot or charges for seats by the hour. The pace is faster because there is more betting when the artificial standard of a pair of jacks is removed, and it is easier to keep track of who is in and who is out when a player cannot check and then come back in. Most of the legal games in California (where draw poker, but not stud, is permitted by state law) are run on this system.

Blind opening, in which the player at dealer's left must open the pot and (usually) the player at his left must raise. This game is necessarily played "pass and out" before the draw but is usually played "pass and back in" after the draw. This is the form of the game favored in men's private clubs throughout the United States from coast to coast, and it is almost the only form of poker played in countries other than the United States. In fact, by many American servicemen returning from World War II overseas, it was called "English poker," "Australian poker," and so on. It is the appropriate game for clubmen, who by definition are well-to-do and like a lot of action. When you start off the pot with anywhere from two to ten times the amount it costs a person to play, the odds offered by the pot are so attractive that usually several players stay in. There is a fallacy connected with this, which I will reveal later, but the fact remains that it gives big bettors a scope for their desire to bet.

Stud Poker

Five-card stud—the first card face down, all others face up. No game has lost popularity so rapidly as this one. Thirty years ago two-thirds of the professional games were five-card stud; today not one-tenth of the games are. Five-card stud, the original and basic form of open poker, is a game for serious and conservative players. It was created to provide more rounds of betting (there can be only two in draw poker, before and after the draw; in stud poker there are four). But five-card stud does not fulfill the player's emotional desire for good hands (the average winning hand is no better than a pair of kings) and except for die-hards the game has no advantage over seven-card stud and several disadvantages—in seven-card stud the average hand seems better,

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

there are five betting intervals instead of four, and the scope for skill is if anything even greater.

Seven-card stud—the first two cards down, the next four up, the last card down, with each player selecting five of his seven cards to use as his poker hand in the showdown. This is the pet game of rich men, celebrities, socialites (who usually play it high-low), and men's clubs where the players happen to like stud better than the usual blind-opening draw game. The true professional dotes on seven-card stud, because in no other form of the game does observation or close figuring play so big a part. Nevertheless, it is not a widely played form of poker.

Freak or Special Games

Lowball, or Low Poker. This is any form of draw poker in which the lowest poker hand instead of the highest wins the pot. Perhaps because most players consider themselves poor cardholders, this form of the game has had a tremendous rise to popularity since the late 1930s, but almost solely on the Pacific Coast. The low-hand principle creates a lot of action because there are many more good one-card draws to otherwise worthless hands than there are in other forms of poker.

High-low poker. Any form of draw or stud poker can be played high-low; the high and low hands split the pot. The true expert, playing in an average game, has a really tremendous advantage in high-low poker. Barring the most unusual bad breaks, it can almost be said that the best player cannot lose in a high-low game. Yet the average player almost never realizes this and welcomes a high-low game because he thinks it gives him a better chance to overcome the luck of the deal.

Wild-card games. These are principally ladies' games and the serious poker player usually scoffs at them. Many serious players do use the bug—the joker considered only as an extra ace or as a filler in straights and flushes—but they too sneer at any greater extension of the wild-card principle. It is true that the use of wild cards is most suitable to purely amateur games, but make no mistake about one thing: the greater the number of wild cards, the more freakish the game, the greater the expert's advantage becomes. Mathematically, luck can play no greater part in one form of poker than in another, and the more complicated the game, the greater is the part played by judgment as to what constitutes a good hand and what constitutes a losing hand.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

Special hands. Even the most serious players sometimes choose to introduce special hand values that have no place in poker tradition—dogs, cats or tigers, skeets, skip straights, four-flushes, and so on. The purpose is to enliven the game by providing more combinations to which even a conservative player may choose to draw. These hands are played chiefly in men's clubs and in home games among more or less serious players. They do not hurt the game if a player can bring himself to remember that all poker values are relative and that you stand to win if you play only good hands and to lose if you play bad hands. The traditional gambler who bet his pile on a pair of sevens against one opponent on a Mississippi steamboat was no worse off than the club player who bets his pile on a little dog or the stud player who bets on ace high. Whatever the form of poker, the pot is usually won by the hand that figures to be better than anyone else's, whether that hand is ace-king high or four of a kind.

I hope that through these pages has run one recognizable thread of thought: All forms of poker are games of skill, and one form is no more a game of skill than any other. The player who complains that in the freak games, or ladies' games, the palookas are always drawing out on him, condemns himself as a poor player. I admit that it hurts to lose a pot you thought you had won, but the more they try to draw out on your best hand, in any form of poker, the more you figure to win.

The greatest fallacy of all is the one so solemnly asserted by California law, that draw poker is predominantly a game of skill and stud poker is not. It would superficially seem that the absence of information in draw poker increases the difficulty of judging the relative value of a hand, but precisely the contrary is true: The more information there is, the greater the scope for reasoning to replace blind guessing. In addition, the expert player of stud poker requires both the drudgery and the imperviousness to distraction that go with remembering all the cards that have been shown and folded. These cards affect the possibility of the hands that may be made. Without remembering at least a certain number of these cards, one cannot play stud poker well. (That is why a stud dealer in a professional game is never supposed to announce "Possible straight flush"—his occasional failure to announce it might give a player the benefit of his observation that a card essential to the straight flush is already dead.)

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

I have no desire to criticize or to influence California legislators, and I am as happy as any other poker player that in at least one state at least one form of poker has been recognized as a game of skill, as it should be in all states; my object is only to point out that all forms of poker, including deuces wild and spit-in-the-ocean, are games in which luck can be overcome and skill is paramount.

I repeat: If you are losing consistently you are not unlucky. You are being outplayed.

WHAT YOU HAVE TO KNOW

No matter what kind of poker game you are playing in, there are certain things you have to know. I list them and comment on them below. They are listed in order from the simplest to the most complex. The more of them you are capable of, the greater your chances of winning. Therefore, obviously I start with "kid stuff" that any poker player worth his salt knows as a matter of second nature and I progress to factors that may not even occur to anyone but players of the highest rank:

1. *The rank of the hands.*

Don't scoff at this—75 percent of all poker players have difficulty remembering.

2. *What constitutes a good hand, a fair hand, a bad hand.*

All these are relative values and vary in accordance with the game you are playing. It is absolutely necessary knowledge that you must take into any game with you. In jackpots draw poker a pair of sevens is a weak hand not worth playing; in blind-opening draw poker, in certain circumstances, it might be a good hand worth a stay and even a bet. A pair of tens and a king in the first three cards constitute a good hand in seven-card stud but are not worth a play in seven-card high-low stud, in which a good starting hand is something like 7-3-2. Later on I tell what is a good hand, a fair hand, and a bad hand in every one of the principal forms of poker. Before you go into a game, make sure that you have a very clear idea of this, whether you get it from experience, from intuition, from this book, or from any other source.

3. *Your chance of improving.*

As I will explain later, poker is not a game of the higher mathematics. All you need is rough approximations of the accurate figures. Nevertheless, you have to know approximately what is your chance of improving the hand you were dealt. To make an extreme example, if you did not know this you would be as likely to play an inside straight (in which the odds are nearly eleven to one against you, odds that you are seldom if ever offered by the pot) as a double-ended straight (when the odds are less than five to one against you, odds that you are frequently offered by the pot).

4. *What you stand to lose and what you stand to win.*

At this point we begin to approach expert stuff. The ultimate

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

phase of mathematical figuring in poker is the number of hands you will win and how much you will win on them, and the number of hands you will lose and how much you will lose on them. You know the chestnut about the man who had three farms and lost them all in poker; he lost the first two drawing to inside straights and not hitting, and the third drawing to an inside straight and hitting. It is not enough to know that when you draw three cards to a low pair the odds are eight to one against making three of a kind. The necessary next problem is, what are the chances that I will win if, in that one case out of nine, I do make three of a kind? If your three of a kind, once you make them, have only an 85 percent chance of winning the pot, then to be mathematically sound you must deduct your losses on the other 15 percent, the times you improve and still don't win.

5. The best hand probably held by each opponent.

This comes even closer to the expert level, and if (as in stud poker) it involves discounting all cards that you know about, it becomes superexpert. I will give you a simple and oversimplified example. In a stud game, you have a pair of kings. Your opponent has an ace showing. What is the chance that he has a pair of aces? If you have watched all the cards that have folded, and if three aces have shown, you know that the chance is zero; if two aces have folded, you know that the chance is a remote one; if one ace has folded, you know that there is a distinct danger; if no ace has shown, there is a probability that your opponent has aces. All of this is modified by your appraisal of the opponent himself. If he is a player who probably would not have stayed unless he had an ace in the hole, then regardless of the mathematics of the case he is likely to have aces. The true expert in a stud game must watch every card dealt, remember every card folded, and judge every opposing hand in accordance with the cards that the opposing player cannot have or probably does not have in the hole.

6. What the opponent thinks he has.

This again approaches the highest degree of expert skill. After all, your opponent may bet into your three aces when he has queens up, because he honestly thinks that queens up will be the best hand. So remember, when the opponent bets, that he may be wrong! Your bets and especially your calls will be based on your estimate of how good a hand the opponent thinks he has.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

7. How to fool or outguess the opponent.

This is as far as you can go in poker skill. It is the highest expert or superexpert level of skill, and it probably cannot be taught, cannot be measured, cannot even be denned. Anyone who has the knack or ability to outguess his opponents probably has such an aptitude for poker that he doesn't need a book to help him win. Furthermore, he probably knows quite well that he doesn't need a book, or my advice, and no doubt if he and I played poker together he could beat me.

Yet the finest poker player or any player can profit from reading books on poker. When he reads such a book, he is reading about what other good poker players have done and the methods they have found effective. / *have never seen a bad poker book.* Many of them are badly organized, yes; usually they are incomplete; analyze them as a whole and they consist mostly of tips that apply to specific situations and not to the game as a whole. Nevertheless they are all worthy publications, praiseworthy, helpful, admirable. If you tried to write everything that is known about poker in all its forms, you would fill a twenty-five volume encyclopedia as big as the Britannica. Many of the finest poker exploits are inspirational and intuitional. They won't necessarily occur even to the most expert player at the strategic moment when they will be most helpful. But if that player has heard about them, through reading books that give the experiences of other players, he doesn't need inspiration or intuition or even practical experience in a game. They become part of his experience. To illustrate this, I will cite a couple of the chestnuts of the game, the classic stories that don't lose their validity because they are so classic or because the situations involved are so rare.

First Poker Chestnut

Five-card stud. Table stakes. Last betting interval.

Player A has Q, J, 10, K showing, plus hole card.

Player B has 6, 10, 8, 4 showing, plus hole card.

Player A has taken the lead throughout; Player B has played along, outlasting other players. Player B has a six in the whole, giving him a pair of sixes.

On the last card, Player A bets out, perhaps half his stack.

Player B knows that there are six cards that would give Player A a cinch hand: A, K, Q, J, 10, or 9. But Player B *taps*.

Player A calls and loses. His hole card is a seven.

There was nothing unusual in the fact that Player B figured

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

the bluff of Player A. Every sucker in the land does that several times per session. The significance of this case is in the fact that Player B tapped and that Player A called.

The unimaginative player, in B's position, would be proud of the fact that he had detected the bluff, would call, and would win the pot. This particular Player B went further. He trusted not only his own judgment but also his estimate of his opponent.

Put yourself in Player A's position. You have bluffed in a case in which the odds heavily favor your having a cinch hand. Your opponent, who has stuck around through three previous rounds of betting, has not been content to call you but has bet everything he has. Why should he do this if he has simply detected your bluff? He could content himself with calling and take in an easy pot. So the only logical explanation for Player B's bet is that he has detected the bluff, but unfortunately he cannot beat the board. Therefore his only chance to win the pot is to let you know that he has detected the bluff in the reasonable expectation that you, being caught in your bluff, will fold your hand and give up.

On this basis, Player A calls and fully expects his K-Q high to beat Player B's king in the hole.

As I said before, this is a matter of inspiration. The exact circumstances will probably never present themselves to you if you play poker all your life. Nevertheless, you should not underestimate the value of knowing about this and dozens or hundreds of other poker situations that some previous good player has encountered and mastered. They are all part of the well-rounded education that the finished poker player must have.

Second Poker Chestnut

Draw poker, jacks to open. \$10 limit. Ante is \$7. (\$1 each).

Player A (next to dealer) opens with two aces. Player B plays. All other players drop.

Player A draws three cards and makes four aces. Player B draws one card.

Player A bets out, Player B raises, Player A reraises, Player B reraises, Player A drops.

This is the only case on record in which a player dropped four aces after raising once. It is unlikely that it could ever actually happen, because poker players are human beings and a human being would not drop four aces, but the situation is entirely logical.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

Player B would not have stayed on a simple draw to a straight or flush, and he would have raised with two pairs, so he was marked with a draw to a straight flush. He knew that Player A knew this, so that he would not have given his second raise if he could merely beat a full house, on the assumption that any full house by Player A would be better than his (because Player A went in with a single pair of openers). Consequently, it must be figured that Player B made his straight flush and Player A's four aces are no good.

It is all inescapable logic, however unrealistic it may be.

The Plan of This Book

Now **I** am going to take up the general considerations that apply to all forms of poker. Sooner or later in this book I will treat each of the principal forms of the game and give specific advice about it, but first I consider it more appropriate to discuss certain important considerations that apply to every form of poker, no matter which particular game you happen to be playing in,

ADVICE TO ALL POKER PLAYERS

There are certain considerations that apply to all forms of poker. I have divided them into the following sections:

1. The ethics and etiquette of the game.
2. The mathematics of the game.
3. Psychology and bluffing.
4. Position.
5. Money management.
6. Card memory and analysis.

I will take these up one by one.

Ethics and Etiquette

Poker is not a sociable game but it is distinctly a *social* game. That is, it is a game one must play with others, and we may assume that every human being would rather be popular than unpopular and also that every group will soon reject a player who is generally disliked by the other players. Therefore if you are playing in a poker game and you want to keep on playing, it behooves you to conform to the social customs of the game and make sure that the other players do not hate you enough to kick you out.

It is notably unprofitable to be recognized as a good fellow in poker games, but it is almost as bad to be characterized as a prime sonofabitch. The object of the winning player is to steer a middle course. He wants to be known as a tough but fair opponent, as a ruthless but honest adversary. The problem is, "How to be honest and yet a winner." My advice is as follows:

1. Sandbagging is a logical part of the game to the thinking player, but for some reason it enrages the average player. Many professional games have been forced to introduce the house rule that you cannot check and then raise. Find out what the custom of the game is and observe it. If it makes the opponents mad for you to check the best hand and then raise, don't do it. It may slightly restrict your style, but it doesn't really have a great effect on your winnings or losses in the long run. In fact, much money is lost by failure to bet the best hand, in the vain hope that some one will bet into you.

2. In some games any comments you make are taken with a grain of salt, in other games the gentlemanly code is adopted and you are not supposed to say that you have a bad hand when you have a good one, that you filled a flush when in fact you

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

didn't, etc. In such games, don't compromise your popularity by violating the customs. You won't lose anything by keeping your mouth shut; the bet speaks for itself anyway.

A woman wrote to Dorothy Dix and said, "Dear Miss Dix: A man wants to marry me but he doesn't know I have false teeth. Should I tell him?" Dorothy Dix answered with classic succinctness, "Keep your mouth shut."

Since the poker player would be a fool to tell the truth about his hand and may win undying unpopularity by playing the gay deceiver and the chatterbox, this is good advice for the poker player too.

3. Be just a little more conservative than the standard established in the game. In all except the toughest games in the country, the majority of players are more liberal than they should be. From curiosity, boredom, or sheer ignorance, they play too often, raise too often, and call too often. It is neither winning style nor good etiquette to become known as the Rock if Gibraltar in such games. If you play them just a little closer to the chest than the average conservative player in the game, but stick your neck out with a gambling play now and then, you will maintain your chances of winning and avoid being stigmatized as a greedy soul who likes money better than good fellowship. It is true that conservatism pays in poker, but don't try to make it pay too much.

4. Conform to the pace of the game. Old-fashioned poker players like to take every step with the greatest deliberation, with close figuring before betting and excursions into psychological analysis before deciding whether or not to call. In distinction to this, the public game in a licensed club or gambling house moves with machine-gun precision and if you pause for as much as ten seconds you will be subjected to impatient prods from the other players. If you are by nature a slow thinker you may suffer a bit in the fast games, but not as much as you will suffer from violating the custom of the game.

5. Don't be a stickler for the laws in an amateur game. The players commit the most horrible crimes known to poker. They drop out of turn. They want to look at your hand when you bet and didn't get called. They relinquish a pot and then want to reclaim it when they find out that they had the best hand after all.

Let them get away with it. I assume your principal desire is to be a winning player (that is the purpose for which this book

was written) and in such a game you will be a winning player just by avoiding the more horrible of the mistakes that are made all around you. Be content with that. They will eventually kick you out of the game because you win too much, but if you don't hurt their feelings by insisting on strict interpretation of the laws you will last quite a while longer.

6. Lose a few arguments. For example, if you have put in your ante and someone says you haven't, why not put it in again? On this subject I would like to make one sage observation. If you argue and then give in reluctantly, you have done just as much damage to yourself as if you argued and never gave in. In fact, you have done more damage; if you decide to stand on the fact that you are right, you may win the admiration of some players. Equally you will win their admiration when you give in fast and graciously although it is obvious that you were right all the time; it is apparent that you are not picayune about small amounts. So you must either stand on your rights or yield with no murmuring or muttering, and you shouldn't do either of them all the time.

7. The traditional problem of etiquette is saved for last: Can you quit when you are a big winner?

Here again the answer depends on the game. In a public game you should have no qualms at all; in a club game you should simply take care to give ample advance notice, such as a half-hour or an hour; and in a truly social game you mustn't. You can nurse your stack and you can refrain from doing anything that would keep the game going, but you can't give the impression that you are in there for the money and not for the sheer fun of it. At least wait until someone else quits and then go along with him.

Just How Important is Mathematics ?

You don't have to be a mathematician to be a good poker player. It doesn't even help.

True, poker offers some of the most fascinating of mathematical problems and for that reason has engaged the attention of the best mathematicians. Some of their researches invade the highest levels of the higher mathematics. Their findings are published in books. You can trust these books. I have read dozens of poker books and as far as I know Oswald Jacoby's is the only one written by a master mathematician, yet I have never seen a poker book in which the quoted odds are wrong by more than

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

some insignificant fraction or percentage. But you do have to have a knowledge of simple arithmetic, a memory for the simple odds that you read about in books, an understanding of what these odds mean, and a quick eye for appraising the size of the pot. It is considered neither cricket nor poker to stop and count the pot every time your turn comes and you have to make a decision.

When you have the best hand around the table, and you know or feel sure that you have the best hand, mathematics doesn't enter into it at all. You simply shove your money into the pot. You may take some comfort from the figures, elaborately prepared by mathematicians, proving that the best hand going in is usually the best hand coming out; but what would it matter? Who ever heard of dropping the best hand?

So the only mathematical questions arise when you may not have the best hand going in. In any such case, you must improve to win. You must then ask yourself three questions: 1, What are the odds against my improving? 2, What are the odds offered me by the pot? 3, What is the chance that I will win if I do improve?

The first question is answered by tables of odds that you can quickly and easily commit to memory; nearly every case that may confront you is treated in the closing pages of this book. The second question—the odds offered by the pot—is a matter of an eyecheck of the pot or knowledge of how much is already in it and how much you have to put in. The third question—your chance of winning if you do improve—is answered partly by the tables of probabilities and partly by your knowledge of the game. Here are some examples to clarify the latter:

First Example

Draw poker, seven players, blind opening. Dealer (G) antes 1, A at his left opens blind for 1, B raises blind for 2. C bets 3. D, E, F, G, A drop. B can stay for 1.

B holds 10-9-8-7-K. The odds are 39 to 8 (5 to 1) against his making a straight. The odds are only 27 to 20 (almost even) against his making a pair of sevens or better.

The pot has 7 chips in it and B can stay for 1. B is offered 7-to-1 odds by the pot.

If B fills his straight he has at least a 90 percent chance of winning—that is, not once in ten times will C have or draw a hand better than a ten-high straight. On this basis only, B should

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

play; because the odds are only 5 to 1 against making the straight and the pot offers him 7 to 1.

B's chance if he makes a pair depends entirely on what kind of player C is. In a good game B would discount entirely the chance of winning on a low pair, because C would not have bet with less than aces or at least kings. In a liberal game, C might have bet with a four-flush or bobtail straight. In this case a low pair might win; but about 15 percent of the time B might lose even if he makes his straight. Here we must assume a tight game, however, because in a liberal game all the other players would not have dropped.

Second Example

Draw poker, seven players, jacks to open, pass and back in. The ante is 7 chips, the limit 2 before the draw, 4 after the draw. Dealer is G. A, B, C, D pass. E opens for 2 and all players from F through C drop.

D holds 10-9-8-7-K. The odds are still 5 to 1 against his making a straight. The pot offers 9 chips against the 2 he must pay to call, or $4\frac{1}{2}$ to 1. He cannot win by pairing because E has at least jacks. The odds against him are greater than the odds he is offered and he throws in his hand.

These are the simplest possible examples (though both of them happen frequently) and in most cases closer figuring will be necessary. The examples were purposely made simple to illustrate the basic theory of the application of mathematics to poker. Mathematics in poker can be very useful—in fact, some knowledge of the odds is essential—but nothing can be more damaging than placing slavish reliance in the mathematical probabilities. Events always alter the *a priori* assumptions. For example, in a seven-hand game of draw poker it is useful to know that two aces should be the best hand, normally, before the draw; but if you hold the aces and three players have already come in before you, you must assume or at least suspect that your two aces are not the best hand; and if one of those players has raised, you can be fairly sure that they are not the best hand.

The mathematical expectancies must also be modified by a further question you must ask yourself: "Is there any point to betting?" For example, you are against one other player in a draw poker game. He draws three cards, and you draw three cards to two jacks. You make jacks up. The odds are $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 1

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

that he did not improve his pair, so mathematically you have a good bet. But the realities are that if he did not improve he probably will not call and your bet becomes pointless, and if he did improve and calls he can probably beat you. Therefore, mathematics or no mathematics, you do not bet. If you had made three jacks you would have bet, because mathematics tells you that the odds are 8 to 1 against his having made three of a kind and you may get a call if he made aces or kings up.

When you are deciding whether to stay or drop, and when betting is normal, mathematics is an excellent guide. When players begin raising and reraising, mathematics goes out the window.

Nevertheless every accomplished poker player should know the odds against improving on various draws and should not forget to compare those odds against the odds being offered by the pot. This may seem so fundamental that it is hardly worth mentioning, but not one poker player in a hundred bothers to do it and the vast majority of all losses suffered in poker games can be attributed to sticking around when the pot offers shorter odds than the odds against improvement.

Psychology and Bluffing

I wish I could write anything useful on the subject of poker psychology, but I cannot. I have read literally thousands of pages on the subject. It is interesting for a poker addict to read about this type of player and that type of player and what their habits are and how to detect them, but from a practical standpoint it is all bosh. Poker psychology is a matter of special aptitude. You have it or you don't. If you have it nobody needs to teach you and if you don't have it nobody can. All I have ever been able to say on the subject is this: If you are being consistently out-guessed, you aren't going to be able to do anything about it. It is no disgrace to lack the knack, but there is no remedy.

Fortunately, it is possible to be a consistent winner in a poker game even if one or two other players surpass you in the intuition (or whatever it is) that gives one player ascendancy over another. If you have better technique (knowledge of the game and application of that knowledge) and if you are more conservative (which means playing only when it is mathematically sound to do so) you can still beat the intuitive player who tosses his chips away in curiosity or overoptimism. If the majority of the players in the game are equal or superior to you in tech-

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

nique and can also outguess you, that simply is no game for you to be in.

Part of what I said about psychology can be applied also to the art of bluffing, and it is an art, never think it isn't; but bluffing does lend itself to a considerable amount of advice and standard rules, which I will discuss here.

First, and most important, you have to bluff sometimes. I know that some players are temperamentally unsuited to bluffing and find it repugnant, but it is a necessary part of the game. If you never bluff, that fact soon becomes noticed and you do not get called on your good hands. If you never get called on your good hands, you are unlikely to win.

The literature of poker takes a standard attitude toward bluffing. "Bluffing is advertising," it shouts. "When you bluff, expect to lose; your reward is that you will then get called on your good hands."

I have always agreed with the conclusion but I have never been able to stomach the premise.

In my opinion, every bet you make in poker should be made for one purpose only: To win the pot. I admit that bluffing is a losing game at best, because in poker the best hand usually wins the pot, but I still feel that every bluff should be so designed as to have the best possible chance to win.

My advice on bluffing policy is as follows. At the start of the game or session, do not bluff. If you are getting called on your good hands, continue not to bluff. After two or three cases in which you do not get called, begin to bluff. After two cases in which you have bluffed and have been caught, stop bluffing until again you find that you are not being called on your good hands.

Scientific bluffing requires a knowledge of position, which I will discuss next. Most of all, however, it requires a certain amount of conscious thought. It is not a matter of inspiration.

Plan your bluff in advance. Imagine a particular hand that you would like to hold and imagine the most skillful way you could play that hand. Then, assuming that you hold the hand you wish to represent, bet throughout as if you had that hand. The most frequent bluff by far is also the most futile bluff. A player draws one card to a straight or flush possibility, fails to fill, and stubbornly bets anyway. This is a bad bluff for a liberal player. It is a good bluff only for a conservative player who almost never draws to a straight or flush possibility, and even

that player must be careful not to bluff into a hand that may comprise two fairly high pairs, because his one-card draw will usually be figured for a two-pair hand. He will get a call that is not suspicious but quite valid.

The next most frequent bluff, and almost as futile a bluff for a good player, is the one in which a player with a single pair represents three of a kind by raising before the draw and drawing two cards, after which he bets. If it is a planned bluff, he may have a two-card draw to a flush or straight rather than to a pair. Before considering this bluff, make sure that if you actually did hold three of a kind you would play them in exactly the same way. A bluff must almost always be planned from the start of the hand. If it is based on a later impulse, it will hardly fool a good player because he will find some inconsistency in the way the hand was played at the start.

This brings us to another cliché of poker, but it is a valid one: It is easier to bluff a good player than a poor player. For example, a poor player will often stay in on a low pair and draw two cards to the low pair and an ace kicker. Don't try to bluff him by drawing two cards. He will be too suspicious of an unsound act that he is capable of doing himself.

Always most effective among bluffs is the pat-hand bluff. It is most effective if you have simply played without raising when you are close to the opener or when there is obviously a chance that several players may stay or even raise after you. For this kind of bluff, if you do get a later opportunity you must raise and, if the pot has previously been raised, you must reraise. It is logical with a pat hand to try to suck in as many players as possible, and if there is any false note—if you would not have played a genuine pat hand in exactly the same way—it is a bad bluff.

The pat-hand bluff is fortified by an occasional instance in which you stand pat with three of a kind or perhaps with aces or kings up. The odds are 9 to 1 against improving three of a kind, which usually will win without improvement anyway, and 11 to 1 against improving aces up, which also will usually win without improvement, so if you have been caught with one or two pat-hand bluffs you help to keep the opponents guessing by repeating your action when you have a fair hand that will probably win on its own. But the important thing to remember is that all these stratagems are designed to keep the opponents guessing and not to be an integral part of your effort to win.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

The basic objective in poker is still and will remain the effort to win as much as possible when you have the best hand.

You will often hear it said that bluffing depends largely on the stakes in the game—that you cannot bluff successfully in a low-limit game and that you can bluff successfully in a high-limit or table stakes game. There is not a great deal to this.

Perhaps, in a wide-open low-limit game along relatively poor players, it is hard to get away with a bluff when there is perhaps \$15 or \$20 in the pot and all you can bet is \$2. But in a good game, this does not necessarily apply. A good player doesn't want to throw away any chips, no matter how few. The mathematical considerations that apply to staying in the pot do not apply to calling a final bet. If there are \$20 in the pot and you can draw cards for \$2, you are getting odds of 10 to 1 and your chance of improving is likely to be considerably better than that. But when it comes to calling a final bet, there are no odds. Either the player has what he represents or he hasn't. If he has what he represents, any chips put in the pot are money thrown away. The difficulty in bluffing in a good game is that a good opponent is all the more likely to read your bluff and call whether the pot is big or small.

The big-bet bluff does usually win, simply because it isn't worth while for a serious player to call it. If you bet a \$50 or \$100 stack to win a \$10 or \$12 pot, you will get away with it more often than not. The difficulty is that even if your bluffs are not detected, you are going from time to time to run into a hand that is good enough to call on its merits and not on suspicion, and in such cases you are likely to lose back more than you pick up in that succession of small pots.

Bluffing in stud poker is different from bluffing in draw poker, in one important respect. In stud poker, your bluff must represent some particular hole card with which you would have played as you did.

A bluff in stud poker can be either a planned bluff or an unexpected bluff that develops from the end situation.

In the planned bluff, the player represents a certain hand throughout and never deviates from the course he would have followed if he had actually had that hand.

In the unplanned bluff, the player winds up with a losing hand but suddenly realizes that he would have played the same way on a different, winning hand. He then bets as though he had that winning hand. For example, A has 6 in the hole and

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

6-Q-8-A showing; B has king in the hole and J-10-K-5 showing. A bets and B drops. This is a semi-bluff, because A might actually have the winning hand (but if he has, he will not get a call anyway). B is justified in figuring A for an ace. If more than one ace has shown, this bluff may lose; if A has raised previously, the bluff should not be attempted. If B is a poor or a wild player who doesn't do much thinking, the bluff will probably lose.

When you are trying to spot another player's bluff, you have to depend on your judgment of the player more than on anything else; but one principle to keep in mind is this: You can't always trust the man who bets or raises but you can nearly always trust the man who calls. Suppose you are C, third man to speak. A, the first man, bets; B calls. Before worrying about beating A, pause to wonder if you can beat B. *He* isn't bluffing.

I will have more to say about bluffing from time to time in the future. At this point I want to repeat a statement that may not have received enough notice when I said it the first time. You are unlikely to be a winning poker player if you never bluff. You must bluff from time to time, win or lose. But whenever you bluff, try to win.

Position

Position in poker is a matter of the number of players who can still act after you. Playing position is a matter of taking into consideration what those players may do, before you decide what to do yourself.

Position is a mystery to most poker players. But next to the relative value of your hand it is the most important thing for a poker player to think about in the game.

In a poker game you will have bad hands, fair hands, and good hands. The bad hands you will throw away. The very good hands will win for you, but you will not hold them often. The winnings on them will be of great importance only in certain rare cases in which you will be lucky enough to hold a very good hand against a hand that is almost as good, such as four of a kind against a high full house, and remember that such a case can go against you as easily as for you. The fair hands represent the bulk of your winnings and losses, and your success in playing the fair hands will depend very largely on your understanding of position.

Cases constantly arise when you consider your position as well

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

as your hand, but at all times there are two main positional objects: First, you want to be last to act if possible. Second, you don't want to get caught between two players who may have betting or raising hands. In a close case, you play along when your position is good and you drop when your position is bad.

Take a case in draw poker in which there will be at most three active players, whom we will call A, B, and C. A has opened and B has raised. C should either reraise or drop. If C simply calls, his position is bad. The normal process will be for A to check after the draw, and for B to bet. Now if C calls, even though he may think he has B beaten, he risks the danger that A can beat him and may even raise back. However, if C reraises before the draw, he makes his position good because normally A and B will check to him after the draw and he can have a free checkout if he has not improved.

In a similar game, A opens, B and C call, and D raises. It is probable that there will be no players after D, in which case he will have the advantage of being the last to speak.

Because it is an advantage to be last, in draw poker one tries to avoid opening (betting first) if he can get anyone else to do it for him. The closer the opener is to his left, the better his position will be after the draw. The closer the opener or the last raiser is to his right, the worse is his position after the draw because the more likely he is to find himself between a betting hand on his right and a doubtful quantity on his left.

In stud poker, the player who takes the lead sacrifices a positional advantage. The exception is when all the active players speak before him. For example, A has the high hand showing and it seems likely that he will continue to have. B and C are in the pot. D is the last of the active players. He sacrifices no position when he bets or raises, because the tendency thereafter will be for the other players to check to him and he will have full freedom of action.

Remember that position, important as it is, should affect your play only on hands that are already questionable. When you have the best hand in either draw or stud, you usually have to bet it regardless of your position.

Here are some everyday examples of position play. In most draw poker games a player in an early position should seldom open unless he is so strong that he wants to invite a raise so that he can reraise, and even then he is usually better off to pass in a "pass and back in" game. When the opener is at your right,

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

you ordinarily simply play along on a very strong hand, such as a pat straight, because you do not want to drive out other players, yet if you were one of the last men to speak you would raise; in either case, you are playing position. The converse case is the one in which you hold two fair pairs next to the opener and raise to drive out other players, on the grounds that a two-pair hand is usually the best before the draw but is hard to improve and suffers a sharp diminution of its winning chances every time another player comes in; on this hand you would not necessarily raise if you were in a late position, so again you are playing position. Exactly the same, in stud poker, when you are next to the high hand showing you will simply call or check and if you are far from the high hand you will raise; again you are playing position.

A good bluff depends more on position than on any other factor. Strangely enough, it is not the usual "good" position that you want for a successful bluff; more often you want what would ordinarily be bad position. For example, when there are four players in the pot the last player is in good position for playing a fair hand but in bad position for bluffing. Those other three players, who checked to him, all have a right to call and because they all checked none of them is afraid of any of the others.

The most successful bluff is one that makes the most dangerous opponent think he is "in the middle." He may then drop the only hand that is good enough to call, for fear one of the players after him will be able to beat him. For example:

Draw poker, seven players, pass and out. A and B drop. C opens, D drops, E stays, F raises, G and C stay. E now raises and after the draw he stands pat and bets. F is likely to drop a fair hand because he cannot tell what G and C will do. G and C are likely to drop against a pat hand anyway.

Money Management

Seasoned poker players will usually assure you that money management is at least as important as any other factor in skillful play. Many of them say that it is the most important single factor. I am going to start this section with a few general but absolutely essential statements.

First, the factor of courage. Here I will quote from a book by the celebrated card expert, John Crawford, because I could not possibly say this better:

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

"A winning poker player must have a combination of two qualities. They are knowledge and courage.

"The knowledge part is what you can read about in books.

"The factor of courage cannot be taught; but you can't win without it. When you get into a poker game, you aren't there to keep from losing. You're there to win. And to do that you must back your good hands to the limit, and risk your money when you think you're right.

"This lack of courage is the reason so many poker players are at a disadvantage once they start losing. Every time another player bets aggressively, their first reaction is one of fear. They check when they should bet, and drop when they should call, thus winning too little on their good hands and losing on too many of their fair hands.

"I have known men who were formerly good poker players but who lost their courage, either through a reduced financial position, or family responsibilities, or even a seemingly interminable losing streak. They promptly changed from good players to poor ones. If the amount of money at stake is frightening to you, I can only recommend that you appropriate a certain amount of money that you are able to lose and play that money as though it were an unlimited supply. If you lose it all, quit the game. While you're playing you'll have a chance to win."

That ends the quotation from Crawford and brings up the factor of capital. Proprietors of gambling houses used to say that their principal advantage came from the fact that "a sucker will sit and lose more than he will sit and win." It is necessary to limit your losses. When you are losing you are probably an inferior player anyway; your standards are distorted in your anxiety to get even. The most widespread of mistakes in money management is to quit a game when ahead and sit out long hours of a futile losers' game when behind.

Figure what your capital is. In any one game, you should not lose more than 5 percent or at the very most 10 percent of that capital. The game selected should be one in which you will get a fair early play for your maximum appropriation, perhaps one or one and one-half or two stacks, but when you have lost that amount you should leave the game. When you are winning, you should stay as long as you want to or as long as you can keep on winning. Suppose your capital is \$500; you should play in a game in which you can probably play an hour or so on \$20 to \$30, even if you are holding nothing, but in no case should you let yourself lose more than

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

Having gotten ahead, you should salt away your capital and play from that point on on the other fellow's money. At the very least, it is psychologically disturbing to wind up a loser after having been well ahead; and any psychological hazard reduces your effectiveness.

Third, always use the same method of money management. A method of play is either right or wrong. If the method isn't right, you shouldn't adopt it in the first place. If it is right, you shouldn't deviate simply because you are feeling down in the dumps on account of your unlucky streak or overconservative because you want to hang on to your winnings. A good rule is this: The first time you find yourself doing something midway of the game that you wouldn't have done on the very first hand, such as playing when ordinarily you would have dropped, or failing to bet or raise or call when ordinarily you would have done so, that is a good time to quit the game. (In appraising your game, be honest with yourself.)

Now, as to your money management in a particular game. You might say that there are two main approaches to the question of betting in poker. One type of player likes to wait for a big hand and play it for a killing. He tries to build up the pot when he is pretty sure he will win it. If he can't build up the pot, he doesn't particularly care how much he wins. The other type of player looks for a lot of action and plays whenever he thinks he has the odds in his favor. He is in many more pots than the first type of player and of course he wins more pots but he invests more going into pots that he doesn't win. I don't mean that he plays bad hands, because then he wouldn't win, but he is content with a succession of small profits.

Since good poker players have followed both lines, obviously there is something to be said for each of them. Much more, however, depends on the game you are playing. In some games, you are forced to one line of play or the other.

Take a draw poker game with a low limit and an ante every pot, or a blind opening—say a blind-opening game in which the dealer antes \$1, the next player opens blind for \$1, the next player raises to \$2. It costs you \$4 per round just to sit in the game. In such a game, you cannot be too conservative. You must be in there every time the odds favor you, even slightly.

For example, in an eight-handed game a pair of aces is likely to be the best hand going in. The best hand going in is mathematically likely to be the best hand in the showdown. If you

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

have aces or better, you have to open, even if you sacrifice some position by doing so, because you have to get your full share of the \$4 pots that start off every deal. There are two reasons why this is forced on you. The cost per round will eat you up otherwise, and the low limit prevents your being badly hurt even when someone has a better hand or draws out on you.

At the opposite side of the problem is the typical stud poker game. Here there is almost never an ante, so there is no overhead. You can afford to play them very close, waiting for the best hand at the table before you bet at all. Assuming you do not suffer socially, you can sit for an hour without ever playing except when you are forced high and must make the first bet.

In a table-stakes game, when the bets are usually low but can rise to extremely high levels, you have a choice of tactics. It is in such games that players flourish who wait for a killing.

The basis of money management is to avoid the occasional cases in which you are tempted to toss in a chip or two to see what would happen, on a hunch, because you are bored, or because you just won a big pot. If a bet is unsound it figures to lose, and in the course of a long session you can throw away a frightening amount of money in these occasional lapses. Self-discipline is important to a poker player.

Many players waste away their stacks by failure to anticipate later developments. For example, you are playing in a game with a high ante and low limit, so that you find yourself able to stay in for \$1 or \$2 when there is already \$10 or \$15 in the pot. At the moment it seems very attractive, because you are getting 7 to 1 or more and you have perhaps a low pair that has one chance in four or five to improve to a probable winning hand. But if you know your game, you may know that the players are liberal and that there are going to be two or three raises and re-raises before it actually comes to a draw. You have to decide in advance if your hand is good enough to stand those raises. Obviously, on a low pair it isn't good enough and you save \$1 by getting out fast.

Another thing to remember is that every raise shortens the odds. I will give you a simple example based on the game mentioned before. You have a \$1 ante by the dealer, a \$1 blind-opening by A, and a \$2 blind raise by B. If C opens (in effect) by raising to \$3, and all the others drop, B can come in for \$1 and get 7 to 1 on his money. There is \$7 in the pot and he need put in only \$1. If another player raises to \$4, the pot goes

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

up to \$11 but it costs him \$2 to stay and now he is getting only 51/2 to 1. And so on, every time there is a raise.

Some authorities advocate adopting a strict system and sticking to it. That would be excellent if there were such a system, but I'm afraid there isn't. A system can cover precisely the times when you play, you raise, or you drop, but it can't cover the questions of judgment that are bound to arise sooner or later—whether or not to call, whether or not someone is bluffing or underestimating his hand. You can lose enough by misjudging these situations to offset the advantages of the system.

The most nearly foolproof system I have seen is the one advocated by the excellent poker writer and player who writes under the name of "Jack King." He applies it to table stakes stud. If he plays at all, it is because he believes he has the best hand at the time, and then he pushes in his entire stack. If his appraisal of his hand is correct (as it almost always will be) he has the best chance of winning. This is a simple application of the rule that the best hand going in will probably be the best hand coming out. But there is the social drawback (in an informal game the other players probably won't like this system); and possibly they can beat the system anyway by calling only when they are pretty sure you have overrated your hand. If they learn to do this, your winning pots are mostly peanuts and you can lose back a lot when you go wrong.

Nevertheless, table stakes creates a completely different set of standards in money management. When circumstances are such that you can bet your entire stack, you assure yourself of a showdown without further risk or problems, and if other players have bigger stacks one or more of them may have to drop out later on when if he had stayed in he might have outdrawn you.

I would like to add just one personal comment on money management. Nothing upsets it so much as playing a "friendly game" in which there are certain players against whom you are not supposed to do your worst. To make the percentages work correctly, you have to be able to win the maximum when you have a winning hand, no matter whether the player with the losing hand is your friend or your enemy. It is unethical—worse, it is considered a form of cheating as bad as stacking the cards—to enter into collusion with another player to trap a third, therefore you have no compensating gain from your friendly agreement. It isn't always possible to avoid such situations, but stay away from them as nearly as you can.

Card Memory and Analysis

There is less of the drudgery of counting and memory in poker than in other card games of skill, but unfortunately you will need some counting and memory even in poker. If you aren't capable of it you can still be a pretty good player but you won't be a master player.

In stud poker, memory of cards is important. In draw poker, you don't have to remember many cards but you do have to analyze the special values of certain cards. In both games, you have to both remember and analyze certain things that your opponents have done. I will take these up one by one.

Memory in stud poker. The stud player simply has to remember what cards have shown and have been folded. Otherwise he won't know the chances that a particular opponent has a particular hole card. Also, he won't know his own chance of improving.

I will *give* you an oversimplified example. Maybe it wouldn't happen more than once in a hundred years, but related cases happen every day. You have four of a kind. Your opponent shows 10-8-7-6, all hearts. If you don't know or don't remember that the nine of hearts showed and folded in another player's hand, you don't know you have a cinch hand. And, as a noted card authority once remarked, "You can't remember a card you didn't see." So you have to watch everything and remember everything. I will explain the practical application of this when I discuss stud poker.

Analysis in draw poker. From the cards in your own hand you can often draw conclusions about opposing hands. Suppose you stay against a player who opened, only the two of you in the pot. He draws three cards. You draw three cards to Q-Q-A-K-6. You make three queens. He bets, you raise; he probably had you beaten with aces or kings going in, but your holding of the ace and king reduced his chance of making three of a kind in either rank and he probably bet on two pair. If your hand had been Q-Q-8-5-3, you might have called instead of raising.

Watching the opponents' play. This is a special knack for some players, as I said in the section on Psychology, but every player can cultivate the knack if he does so consciously. You must deliberately say to yourself (silently, of course), "Joe stayed against a showing ace when he had a six down and a jack up,"

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

or, "Joe stayed against two opponents when he had a pair of sixes." If you don't notice and analyze this information consciously, you are far less likely to remember it.

In this connection, it is a good idea to insist on one of the universal laws of poker: That every hand in the showdown, whether it wins or loses, must be shown. Though this is a universal rule, it is more honored in the breach than in the observance. In 99% of all cases, one player will say, "Kings up," and flash his hand briefly; the other will say, "That's good," and throw his hand away without showing it. I admit that you will profit from doing the same when it is *your* hand that would have to be shown; but when it is somebody else's hand, you can legally ask to see it and in most games you won't make yourself unpopular by doing so—especially if you pretend that you're just curious.

As I said before, I will have much more to say on the subject of card memory and analysis when I discuss the particular games, which I will now take up one by one.

DRAW POKER

There are many forms of draw poker and I will have something to say about several of them, but there are a few considerations that apply to every form of draw poker and I will discuss those first.

1. *The draw.* If your object is merely to improve your hand, there is no question that you are best off making the maximum draw: that is, three cards when you have a pair, or two cards when you have three of a kind.

That does not answer the entire question, however. Many times your object will not be simply to improve your hand. Perhaps you will need some specific degree of improvement, and perhaps it will be more important to deceive the other players than to improve your hand.

First, consider the case in which you need some specific degree of improvement. Suppose you know, no matter how, that you need two very high pairs—preferably aces up—to have a chance of winning the pot. You have a pair, but it isn't high enough, even if you catch another pair. Your three unmatched cards include an ace. This is a classic case—should you draw three cards to the pair or should you draw two cards to the pair and the ace kicker?

If you hold the ace kicker, the odds are only about 4 to 1 against your getting aces up or better; if you do not hold the ace kicker, the odds are about 51/2 to 1 against your getting aces up or better. This is one of the rare cases in which it pays to hold a kicker. But you have to be quite sure that aces up, specifically, is the hand you want. Every so often, when you do make aces up by holding the kicker, your opponent will fill his full house and ruin you (this will happen almost precisely once in twelve times) and your three-card draw will give you about ten times as good a chance of making an even better hand and beating him on those few occasions. Holding the ace kicker is almost the only case I know in which a special draw has a mathematical advantage over the customary draw, and even here I know many good poker players who would rather draw three cards to the pair and take their chances on the many added opportunities to draw a still better hand, three of a kind or a full house or even four of a kind.

Now suppose your purpose is not to improve but to keep the opponents guessing. This case arises chiefly when your original

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

hand is probably better than any hand another player will draw. The simplest possible example, but probably the least useful, would arise when you are dealt four of a kind. (It is the least useful example because it will happen so seldom.) You have a choice between drawing one card and standing pat. Your decision depends entirely upon the betting before the draw. If the betting includes two or three raises, and you think there are strong hands out against you, your best chance is to stand pat. You will then be figured for a straight, since straights constitute well over 50 percent of all the pat hands that are dealt. A player who makes a high straight, a flush, or a full house will surely call a bet, will usually stand a raise, and with the better hands will reraise and then call your second raise. However, if you are up against weak hands before the draw and have simply raised once, you are better off to draw one card. You will then get a call on two high pair, a possible raise on three of a kind, and tremendous action on a full house, especially if it is a high one.

As I said, knowledge of how to play a pat four of a kind isn't going to be of much moment in your practical poker play. Knowledge of how to draw to three of a kind is going to be of tremendous importance.

If there were not so many exceptions (poker being a game of infinite variety) I would say flatly that for tactical purposes one card should always be drawn to three of a kind even though mathematics favors the two-card draw. Very seldom do you have a chance to play three of a kind any differently from two pairs before the draw. Getting called after the draw may depend largely on making the other players think your hand was two pair rather than three of a kind going in. A one-card draw represents a special advantage in draw poker, and any player who draws one card and is in any kind of good position will find the other players checking to him, giving him the maximum opportunity to make the best decision.

The important things to remember about three of a kind are these: Unless you have more than three opponents, your hand will probably be best at the showdown even if you do not improve it. While a two-card draw gives you a much better chance to make four of a kind and a slightly better chance to show some improvement, in most hands it would not matter if you drew one card, or two cards, or stood pat, you would still win.

Therefore the draw to three of a kind is partly a matter of

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

your individual tactics and your recent history in the game. If you have not represented the hand too strongly before the draw, and if you are a player who has been detected once or twice recently drawing two cards to a pair and a kicker, then the two-card draw will be tactically the best. Your chance of improvement is at the maximum and you are likely to get called by players who suspect you of bluffing. If you have been called in one or two pat-hand bluffs, that is an admirable time to stand pat on three of a kind. They will probably win without improvement and you may get a call. But year in, year out, without background, the one-card draw will work out best.

A four-card straight or flush cannot possibly represent any problem. You draw one card. Ninety-nine percent of the times, two pairs represent no problem either; you draw one card. There is a very slight exception in the case of two pairs. If you have two pairs that will probably win without improvement (for example, against one or two players who have not represented any great strength before the draw) and if you think they might suspect you of a pat-hand bluff, you might consider occasionally standing pat on your two high pairs, which should be no lower than queens up. As a matter of fact, it is good tactics to do this occasionally to give variety to your game and to keep the opponents guessing both when you have a genuine pat hand and when you are trying a pat-hand bluff; but be sure to treat this as a method of bluffing and not as a legitimate method of playing poker. Like anything unnatural in poker, it will not win if employed too often.

Aces occupy a unique place in poker. Against one opponent and often against two, aces have a better-than-even chance to win unimproved. If you are the last man to speak before the draw, and two other players are in, and you have a pair of aces, you might consider simply staying in and drawing one card. This is especially effective as the aftermath of two or three conspicuous cases in which you have drawn to a straight or flush possibility and have failed to fill. If both the players before you draw three cards, you draw one and bet; you may get a suspicious call from one of the three-card draws, even if he does not improve. The odds against your improving aces on a one-card draw is less than 5 to 1 against you, while the odds are 21/2 to 1 against you even if you drew three cards. Often such a mathematical disadvantage can be sustained in the interests of better tactics.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

Freak draws. In one sense, these should hardly be worth discussing. If you have to make a freak draw, you shouldn't have been in there in the first place. Nevertheless, occasions do arise (some of them legitimately) when you have to make a freak draw, and the following general advice can be given:

A five-card draw is incredible, even when (as in many blind-opening games) you got 7 to 1 odds to go in against one opponent.

It is better to draw four to an ace, if the rules of the game permit a four-card draw, than to draw three to an ace-king.

It is better to draw two cards to three cards in sequence if A-K-Q, or K-Q-J, or Q-J-10, than to draw two cards to a possible flush such as J-8-7 of diamonds. One of the possibilities is that you will make one high pair or two pairs and that they will win, while the chances of making the actual straight or flush are almost too remote to be considered.

The draw of one card to an inside straight is almost always wrong. The odds against making it are almost 11 to 1. Few are the hands that do not offer at least as good odds on making a single high pair or two pairs if you simply throw away all the unlikely cards and draw four cards to the highest card or three cards to some freak combination such as a king and jack of the same suit. The inside straight is justly notorious in poker. Almost the only case in which you draw one card to an inside straight is the case in which you hold something like 9-8-6-5 or lower and know that even pairing your high cards will not give you a chance to win. Even so, you can draw four cards to your highest card and have a 1-in-12 chance to make two pair or better—the same chance you have when you draw one card to an inside straight.

In the closing pages of this book are tables of the mathematical odds that tell your exact chances on most of these combinations.

I have paid no attention here to the question of drawing when there is a wild card in the game, such as the bug or the joker, because all such cases will be taken up separately.

2. *The strength of your hand.* The first thing to remember in draw poker, and in nearly any poker game, is that the best hand going in is usually the best hand coming out. The next thing to remember is that the more players who stay against the best hand, the fewer pots it will win but the more money it will win.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

The sole exception to this is the case of two low pairs, a special hand that I will discuss separately.

The strength of your hand in draw poker depends entirely on the number of players who have not dropped.

This has proved to be a difficult concept for many poker players and I will try to explain it in this way: Mathematicians have worked out the hand that is likely to be highest in a game of any given number of players, for example eight players, or four players, or only two players. When a player before you has dropped out, from the mathematical standpoint you can forget that he was ever in the game. Consider only the players who are yet to speak. As a simple example, in an eight-handed game of draw poker it takes two aces to have a better-than-average chance of being the high hand; but if you are the seventh man, and the first six have already dropped, and you have only the eighth man to contend with, the mathematics of the situation become precisely the same as if you were playing in a two-handed game and the first six players had never existed. In that case, two deuces or an A-K high will have a better-than-even chance of being the high hand.

If you have absorbed that, you can follow the table below, which tells what you have to have to have a good chance against any given number of players who are yet to be heard from:

<i>Number of Players Yet to Speak</i>	<i>Hand with Better than 50% Chance of Being</i>
6 or 7	2 Aces
5	2 Kings
4	2 Queens
3	2 Tens
2	2 Eights
1	2 Deuces or A-K high

In certain games, in which the overhead is high (as explained in the section on "Money Management"), you must make the opening bet on such a hand to give yourself a better-than-average chance to win in the game. In games in which the overhead is low, you can afford to be more conservative (and winning players usually are somewhat more conservative); for example, you can refuse to open in any but the last three positions on anything less than aces, and you can refuse to open in the last three positions on anything less than queens. I do that myself, except in a jackpots game, in which I will open in

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

last or next-to-last position on the minimum of jacks and take my chances on the possibility that some earlier player was sand-bagging. If I do open on jacks and an earlier player stays and draws three cards, I tend to draw one card and bet, representing two pair and trusting that my opponent will not have the acumen to raise me and force me to drop if he does not improve. If he raises me and I have not improved, I usually drop. I may lose to a bluff occasionally, but I more than make it up in the cases in which I actually did have my two pair or a better hand and can legitimately call his bluff.

Every mathematical figure in poker must be modified by later information. The mathematicians work on the basis known as *a priori* (meaning before the expected event has actually happened). Most of poker would be termed by mathematicians *a posteriori* (meaning that the calculations are made when actual information is already available). If you are the last hand in a seven-man game and the third man has opened and the fifth man has stayed and the others have dropped, you must know (if the game is reasonably strong) that there is at least a pair of kings out against you. You will not stay on less than two aces or two low pairs, in spite of any number of mathematical tables that tell you that two eights stand a chance to win against two opponents. However, in a wide-open game in which a player cannot bear to throw away a pair of tens or a four-flush, you may choose to stay on a little less.

In a good game, no one bets against a one-card draw with less than three of a kind or aces up, and if the one-card draw bets or raises, no one raises it without a flush. If the one-card draw reraises, he filled at least an A-Q or A-K flush and a possible full house, and his raise cannot be reraised without at least jacks or queens full. The profits in poker come from getting a call when you have a slightly better hand than your opponent; they are dissipated chiefly by the occasional chip thrown away in staying on a losing hand or calling on a doubtful hand, but they can be as easily dissipated, and much faster, by giving a very strong hand a chance to raise or reraise and then calling.

Here so much depends on appraising your opponent that it is hard to generalize. A poor player will become overly enthusiastic when he has a good hand; he will become almost unrestrainable when he has made that good hand by drawing to it, as for example when he draws to four diamonds headed by the queen

and catches another diamond. It might be the better part of valor merely to call him on a low full house, but it would be stupid to drop a low full house or an A-Q flush on his second raise, on the grounds that an intelligent player would have been fearful even of calling on his hand. A very good player, however, when he raises the bet of a hand that represented two pairs going in and drew one card, should not be called on less than jacks or queens full. Against such a player, there will be a net gain in the long run by throwing away a straight.

I would say that when there is action in the pot, there are three hands worth staying on: Two aces, but no lower pair; if the aces improve, they have an excellent chance of being high. A straight or flush draw if the pot offers substantially more than the odds against filling—that is, 6 or 7 to 1, as against the 4- or 5-to-1 odds against filling. And, third, a good hand going in—no less than queens up or a low three of a kind. A lower pair than aces, and especially two low pairs, are candidates for the trash can.

3. *The play of two pair.* Some authorities have said that 90 percent of one's winnings or losses in poker can be attributed to the play of two low pairs (no higher than tens up). This is undoubtedly an exaggeration, but it serves to emphasize an important point.

The basic principle governing the play of two pair is this: Before the draw, the odds are nearly 2 to 1 (in any draw game) that any two pair will be the highest hand. But the odds are 11 to 1 against improving.

Mathematically, two low pairs have a better-than-average chance of standing up (without improvement) against one or two opponents; they stand to lose if three or more opponents are in the pot. Queens up is the lowest hand that stands to win against three opponents, and aces up against four opponents. This takes into consideration the chance, one in twelve, of improving the two pairs you are dealt.

From this knowledge has been derived a general rule that has almost become a poker precept: If you have two pair, raise at once, so as to drive out as many as possible of the other players.

It is true that a raise tends to drive other players out and that you want other players driven out when you have two low pairs. Nevertheless, the rule is faulty. You should raise only when you are the second man (the one next to the opener). You should merely stay when two players are in before you. You

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

should drop two low pairs when there are three players in before you. When I say two low pairs, I mean in this case anything less than queens up. I am also assuming that the pot is offering you no more than 6 to 1. With two low pairs against three preceding players, in a reasonably tight game, the odds are better than 2 to 1 that one of them will improve and beat you even if none of them has you beaten going in—and my experience is that one of them probably has you beaten going in, because there simply aren't enough high pairs around to give each of three intelligent players a high pair that would justify his playing.

Taking the other side of the medal, much money is lost by failure to back two low pairs strongly enough against one or two players who drew three cards. If you have created doubt in their minds by an occasional unsound one-card draw or bluff, and if you have stayed after both are in, a one-card draw and a bet may get a call from a hand that did not improve. When two opponents draw three cards each, it is better than even that neither of them improved, and when you have a better-than-even shot and can get a call from an unimproved hand, you have a good bet. But if you are known as a man who would not play "on the come" in second position, or if it is known that you would not open on a mere possibility, or if you are in a jackpots game in which you could not legally do so, do not bet; no one will call unless he can beat you. You have to be the third man to speak.

In playing two pair, the thing to watch out for chiefly is the case in which the opponent will not call unless he improved and can beat you if he did. For example, you open on two pair and draw one card. One player stays against you and draws three cards. If you do not improve, a bet is futile. He knows you would not have opened on less than two pair, and he will not call unless he has improved and has at least two pair himself. Against a good player, betting out on the opening hand in such a position leaves you wide open to a reraise, which can be a very successful bluff if your opponent has you figured correctly.

Two low pairs should seldom be opened in a "pass and back in" game. The absence of high cards in the hand makes it more likely that another player will have a high pair and will open; and of all hands, two pair is the hand on which you want if possible to be the last to speak. Queens up or better may be

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

opened, and should be opened if the overhead is high and the antes are worth grabbing, but many good players simply do not open on any two-pair hand under aces up if they are earlier than fourth from the dealer.

In a "pass and out" game, you must open on any two pair in any position. Your hand figures to be the best around the table and you cannot afford to toss in the best hand. Just remember to be oh, so careful in playing them afterward. Except in a wild game in which players raise on single pairs and four-flushes, no two pair lower than kings up can stand a raise.

Why do I establish queens up as the minimum for two "high" pairs? Because in most games I have observed players opening on jacks and staying on queens. If one of these hands draws a second pair, you will want to have a chance.

I will summarize the play of two pair in the average draw game. In a "pass and out" game, open. Next to the opener, raise. Separated by more than one active player from the opener, never raise and consider (depending on the game) whether or not you should drop. Do not stand a raise in any case in which three players are in the pot ahead of you, and do not stand a raise on less than jacks up unless the raise was made by the player next to the opener.

Play of three of a kind. In a game of draw poker, any three of a kind figure to be best before the draw four times out of five. The advantage of three of a kind is that they will usually win without improvement and if improved they may win a big pot. The disadvantage of three of a kind is that the odds are at best (with a two-card draw) about 8 1/2 to 1 against improving, and since three of a kind can be played strongly before the draw, the loss is heavy whenever another player draws out on you. A low three of a kind are not worth betting (after the draw) against more than two three-card draws or against more than one one-card draw.

For this reason, a low three of a kind (lower than tens) should be played before the draw about the same as two high pairs. Raise fast, drive out other players, limit the number of other players who will draw against you.

I have discussed the draw to three of a kind elsewhere; but to repeat, a hand that is opened on a low three of a kind and has not been raised should usually draw one card and bet. He will get calls from two high pairs, and he is likely to get a call rather than a raise from a straight or flush that has filled, for

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

DRAWING



Draw one—do not split
two pairs unless you
know an opponent has
two higher pairs.

Draw one—split openers
 only to draw to a straight flush.

Draw one—but do not
 split openers to draw to
 a straight or flush.

DEUCES WILD



unless there have been several raises,
 in which case draw one to a royal
 flush.

Deuces wild—draw two to the A-A-2
 Deuces wild—discard the six of hearts
 and draw one card to the straight
 flush, flush or straight possibility,

POKER WITH THE BUG



The joker is the bug—draw three cards
 to bug and ace.

The joker is the bug—draw two cards
 to bug, ace, jack.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

POKER WITH THE BUG



The joker is the bug—usually draw one to the two pair.



The joker is the bug—usually draw two to the bug and pair.



Having opened, draw three. If another player opened, draw one.



Having opened, draw one. (In Blind Opening, against one opponent, draw three.)

OPENING



Open; the chance of a higher pair is reduced by the A-K holding.



Pass, unless dealer or next to dealer; someone else should open.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

fear he too has filled (a full house) and can raise back.

A hand with a low three of a kind that has been raised before the draw and has not raised back (and usually, low threes should not raise back) will do best to draw two cards, look at his draw, and bet. This is especially true if the raiser drew one card. The raiser may call on two high pairs, and he may figure the opener to have drawn to a pair and an ace kicker.

Three of a kind from jacks to aces are worth a reraise before the draw. Having reraised, the hand almost must draw two cards, for maximum chance of improvement. However, the action here is affected by position and the draw. If you are last to draw and speak with high threes, and if you are up against two two-card draws or one two-card and one one-card draw, you might do worse than to draw one card and check on the grounds that you might as readily have raised back with aces up. You might then get a bet against you on any threes. If, having raised, you draw two cards and check, no one is going to bet into you (unless he can beat you); if you bet, low threes probably will not call.

With high threes (at least queens, preferably kings or aces) it may pay merely to call against two opponents or only one. You draw one card. The raiser will probably bet into you.

However, in a "pass and back in" game, any three of a kind make a good pass as first or second player after the dealer. Usually, nothing is lost except the antes if nobody opens. Your position after the draw is bound to be best, because you will be the last player from the opener to speak. You have an automatic raise if two or three players come in. You can choose instead to have an excellent positional advantage if there are more than three players in: You refuse to raise, draw one card, and can be figured by every other player for a possible straight or flush draw (because there was so much money in the pot before you came in). This will give you a big pot when you hit a full and one or two players before you improved; it will often get you a call when you bet as last man, since your bet might be on a busted straight or flush draw; and you retain freedom to get out without further cost if there is much action before the betting reaches you.

With three of a kind it is most important not to find yourself in the middle when the opener is on your right and there are one or more one-card draws on your left. Much of the money lost on three of a kind can be attributed to betting in such a

case. In bad position, you can only check three of a kind. A bet is futile because the one-card draws have either busted and will drop, or have filled and will call or raise and win; or will bluff and put you in a most uncomfortable position.

There is a further reason why it pays to check, rather than bet, when you hold threes in a bad position (with active players both to your left and to your right). If you check in that position, there will often be a showdown and you will turn up with three of a kind that obviously you had all along. Your opponents will remember this and you will save yourself some problems when you have two pairs and wouldn't know whether or not to call a speculative bet.

4. *"Don't bet into a one-card draw."* This is the most useful and yet the most costly of all poker precepts. If you never bet into a one-card draw, you are unlikely to be a winner in a tight poker game. Yet betting into a one-card draw is the most dangerous thing you can do in poker. The decision has to be a matter of discrimination and reconstruction of the opponent's probable hand.

Before deciding whether to bet or check (if permitted), consider the hand the opponent is most likely to hold. This must necessarily depend upon your appraisal of the opponent, but your appraisal can be a rough one—he is known to be a wild and gambling player, or he is known to be a conservative player. Strangely enough, you are safer betting into the conservative player than into the gambling player, if you have two high pairs or better. Against the conservative player, aces up and three of a kind are often equivalent; he didn't stay on less than two pairs, and either of your possible hands will beat him if he calls. Against the gambling player, aces up and three of a kind are still equivalent. He may have drawn to a straight or flush, and if he hit he can beat you and if he didn't he will throw his hand away. The moral is nevertheless apparent. Against the conservative player, you can make money by betting because you may get a call on a fair hand. Against the gambling player, you can't make money by betting because he won't call if he missed, and he will raise if he hit.

Therefore, a bet into a one-card draw is probably justified against one or two opponents who probably stayed on sound hands; it is not justified against a player who is wild and might have stayed on anything, or against a player who stayed when there was already five or six times as much in the pot as he

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

had to put in and who might therefore have gone in on a straight or flush possibility.

JACKPOTS (Jacks Or Better To Open)

This game has several unique features. First, the pot seldom offers more than 2 to 1 odds in the early stages; in the classic game, there are eight players, each antes a quarter to start the pot with \$2, and the limit is \$1 before the draw, \$2 after the draw (or any ante, first limit and second limit proportionate to those figures). Unless at least three players are in before you and no one has raised, you must throw away all bobtail straights and four flushes. Since you know that the maximum hand is a pair of jacks, you can play no less than kings as second man and need at least aces thereafter. The game is usually played by casual and unknowing players who stick around with any low pair and often with less, but if the game is played seriously there is little action and it is chiefly a game of waiting for the big pot. After all, you will figure to hold a hand as good as aces only once in six or seven deals.

The average winning hand after the draw is jacks up.

Jackpots is a game for sandbagging. You should seldom open if you are earlier than fifth man, and then you should have kings; only the sixth or seventh man can dare open on jacks or queens. It is almost incredible that a man in first or second position can gain by opening, because with a fair hand (up to kings) he is likely to be beaten before the draw and with a better hand he will do better by waiting for someone else to open and then raising if there are not too many players (or, in a wide-open game, even if there are). Three of a kind or a pat straight are a good pass in the first three positions. If no one opens, don't grieve; probably your maximum gain would have been the antes if you had opened, and you are better off in the long run waiting for big action on good hands.

The foregoing assumes the usual rules—that the opener bets first. Therefore the opener automatically endows himself with the worst position, and the player who checks before the opener and then comes back in will have good position. He will act last or nearly last.

I give you the record of a game in one of California's best legal clubs, playing jackpots, simply to show to what lengths experienced players will go to avoid being the opener:

Jackpots; eight players; pass and back in. A (worthless) checks;

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

B (Q-Q-Q-6-6) checks; C (worthless) checks; D (9-9-9-8-3) checks; E (A-A-A-A-2) checks; F and G (both worthless) check; H, dealer (Q-Q-J-7-4) opens. A drops, B raises, C drops, D raises, E stays, F, G, H drop. B raises, D stays, E raises. B raises, D stays, E raises. B raises, D stays, E raises, B and D stay. No hand improves; B and D check, E bets, B calls, D drops. E wins.

It is noteworthy that not only the second player, B, with a pat full, and the fourth player, D, with three nines, refused to open, but even that the fifth player, E, with four aces dealt to him, refused to open. The dealer, H, was justified in trying to steal the ante on his pair of queens, and he was very wise to drop when he saw what the situation was. Probably D stayed a bit longer than he would have if he had read the situation correctly, but most players would have done as he did. The hero of the hand was the fifth player, E, who was willing to let his four aces pass without profit if he could not make a killing on them. Mathematically, there was as much chance that there would be openers after him as that there were sandbaggers before him. This was a celebrated hand because the pot was relatively so large and the play was so unusual. Nevertheless it is an example of the tactics used by many of the most successful players in jackpots.

The disadvantage of opening and the advisability of playing for the killing are if anything intensified when a jackpots game is played with table stakes, as it often is. In such a game the ultimate bet can be very large and the advisability of playing for the big pot is even greater.

I have played more in a jackpots game of draw poker with high stakes or table stakes than in any other game, and my advice to a player in such a game is as follows: Don't worry about the quarters that roll away round after round; they will not affect your winnings materially, even if the stakes are high and they happen to be dollars. Don't grieve when you have a big pat hand, choose not to open, and see the hand passed out; you wouldn't have won much anyway. These are normal hazards of the game. There are many games in which the average pot is \$3 or \$4 and the extraordinary pot is \$40 or more. A few of those big pots in the course of a long session will make a player a winner regardless of his results on the other pots.

But remember (as I said in the section on Money Management) that this approach is mathematically unsound when the overhead is high.

STRAIGHT DRAW POKER

This is the game in which you can open on anything and in each turn you must bet or drop ("pass and out"). In each turn you must at least chip along, where in a jackpots game you could check free.

Much depends on the relative value of a white chip (the chip of lowest value; it may be blue). Some players make the white chip of nominal value only—say ten cents, when the limit is \$1 before the draw and \$2 after, and when the white chip is seldom bet except for perfunctory purposes. From such games came the entire present custom of checking free; the "white check" was worth so little that it seemed hardly worth while to keep a stack of them and bother to put them in.

But in the usual pass-and-out game, the white chip is twenty-five cents when the limit is \$1 and \$2. Also, in such games there is usually an ante by each player of one white chip, which in an eight-hand game creates a pot of \$2 before the first bet. In such a game the overhead is high (\$2 per round) and the player must look for action on small pots as well as big ones, as otherwise the overhead will ruin him.

To maintain your chance of getting action on your fair hands, you have to toss in your white chip. Yet there are at least two reasons for being conservative. First, the white chips do mount up. Second, if you are the first to toss in your white chip, technically you become the opener and have bad position after the draw.

One thing many players tend to forget in an "open on anything" game is that although jacks or better are not required to open, there are going to be just as many good hands around the table as there are in a jackpots game. At the start the pot may seem to offer you 7- or 8-to-1 odds on your white chip, but before the betting is finished it is very likely that someone will make the full bet of \$1 and very likely someone will raise, and it will cost you just as much as it would have cost in jackpots. If you wouldn't have opened or stayed in jackpots, usually you shouldn't open or stay in this game. However, there are some important exceptions.

For example, in the early positions you should toss in your white chip with an open-end straight or a four-flush. Otherwise, it is usually unwise to play without a high pair (kings or better; many successful players say queens or better) or, of course, a

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

better hand. With a really strong hand, one on which you might have sandbagged by passing in a jackpots game, it is usually best merely to chip along in this game, awaiting some action in the betting and then raising when it comes back to you.

One important difference between this game and jackpots is that you can play percentages in late positions, even if you wouldn't have had openers in jackpots. I will repeat the hands it takes to have a better than even chance to beat a given number of players who have not yet been heard from:

HAND REQUIRED	TO BEAT
Any pair	1 opponent
Eights	2 opponents
Jacks	3 opponents
Kings	4 opponents
Aces	5, 6, or 7 opponents

That is, if you are next-to-last man—only the dealer yet to be heard from, the other players being out—you can make the limit bet with any pair; if you are third from the end, your pair should be at least eights; if you are fourth from the end, it should be at least jacks; and so on.

However, there is more theory than practical value in such a table. Usually one or more of the early players will have put in their white chips and you cannot be sure whether they are weak or strong. Especially you must watch the position of the players who are in ahead of you. If the first or second men from the dealer have chipped along, it doesn't mean a thing; they may have anything. If the fourth or fifth man has merely chipped, he probably does not have a very strong hand. He would probably have bet the limit if he had had a good hand.

In late positions you can't afford to let the first round go by with nothing but white chips in there. From about the fourth man on, and certainly no later than the fifth man, you should almost invariably make the maximum bet if you have aces or two pairs—any hand that figures to be high before the draw. Every now and then you will merely chip along on such a hand, either because you have reason to believe there is going to be action later or for the purpose of mixing up your game and keeping the other players guessing. Such cases should be rare.

Both the nature of this game and human nature are such that there are many more draws to straights and flushes than there are in any other form of draw poker. In jackpots a player will

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

(or at least should) throw away a straight or flush draw without hesitation when he is first or second man from the opener; he does not yet know how big the pot will be and it costs too much to come in. In this game, however, it costs only a chip, the pot already offers him excellent odds for that one chip, and he can make his final decision later.

At that later time, he must chiefly consider two things: First, the size of the pot; second, his position. If a couple of players have merely chipped after him, they may be waiting to raise and the price of his entry will go up. In such a case he should pocket his one-chip loss and get out. When no one can raise after him, he should stay if the pot gives him 5 to 1 or better.

The opener's position is not too bad. If he fills, he can judge from the draws whether to bet out or merely chip and wait. If he does decide to chip and wait, at least he will have heard from every player before his time comes again. A player can be seriously embarrassed when the opener is at his right and bets, because he may be in the middle of a couple of raising hands and lose a lot of money instead of settling early for his one white chip.

BLIND OPENING

Of all forms of draw poker, this is one in which it is most important to play sheer percentages. I mentioned before (page 34) that you cannot afford to sit back and wait for a killing or a cinch in this game, because the overhead per round is so high. When you have a better-than-even chance to win, you must be in there.

Although the blind-opening game was created to add to the amount of action, the game should actually be played quite conservatively because the average bet is so high. I am taking a typical game in which dealer antes \$1, next player opens blind for \$1, next player raises blind to \$2, limit still \$1 before the draw and \$2 after. There are \$4 in the pot, but it costs at least \$2 to come in (and usually the automatic first bet is a raise to \$3) so that the first man in is getting at most 2 to 1 for his money and usually only 4 to 3—little better than even money. He has to have a pretty good hand to do this. The first three men aren't going to have merely a straight or flush possibility; they are going to have very high pairs or better. Of course this

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

game is necessarily pass and out, because the pot has already been opened, so you can always figure how many players after you are still alive and dangerous. In counting the players yet to speak you must, of course, count the blind opener and the blind raiser; but they were forced to bet, and until they have taken voluntary action you do not figure their hands to average any higher than those of any other players who have not been heard from.

The following tables will tell you what you should have to make the first call or raise (when you are the first player to speak, which means a bet of \$2 or \$3), and to stay in when someone else has bet.

Blind opening; eight players; dealer (G) antes \$1, A opens for \$1, B raises to \$2.

PLAYER	SHOULD CALL (\$2)	SHOULD RAISE (\$3)
C	Kings	Aces
D	Kings	Aces
E	Queens	Kings
F	Tens	Queens
G	Eights	Tens
A	Ace-high (\$1)	Tens (\$2)

A, of course, is in a special position because he already has \$1 in there and is getting 4 to 1 from that pot if he merely calls.

Players Ahead of You

Who Have Come in

(not including or Blind Raiser)	If Game Is Conservative	If Game Is Liberal
1	Kings	Queens
2	Two low pairs	Aces
3	Queens up	Two low
4	Kings up	pairs
5	Aces up	Tens up
6	Three Threes	Queens up Kings up

The play of straights and flushes is very important in this game. You will note that player A (the blind opener), when everyone except the blind raiser has dropped, should not draw to an open-end straight or to a four-flush. The pot is offering only 4 to 1 and for such a draw you should have 5 to 1 or better.

Because this game may tend otherwise to become dull, many groups seek to enliven it by the introduction of two or more of the special hands—dogs, cats or tigers, skeets, etc. In playing

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

such hands, you simply count the number of cards that will give you a straight or better, subtract that number from 47, and know the odds against you. Though such a hand will usually win if you fill, you should still require substantially higher odds from the pot than the odds against you.

Here is an example of figuring those odds: You are playing dogs (the big dog being ace to nine with no pair) to beat a straight but lose to a flush. Your hand is Q-J-10-9. There are twelve cards that will give you a straight or better—the four aces, any of which will give you a big dog; the four kings and the four eights, any of which will give you a straight. This is a twelve-timer; you subtract 12 from 47 and find that the odds against you are 35 to 12, or almost exactly 3 to 1. If the pot offers you 4 to 1 or better, you can afford to draw to such a hand. Against one opponent this is a good draw at any odds because any one of twelve other cards will pair you and any pair you make has a chance to win. I do not advise raising on such a hand, or on nearly any hand that must be improved to win, because every raise shortens the odds offered by the pot.

Sometimes, when you are playing the special hands, the inside straight comes into its own—the only time in the game of poker in which it does. For example, if you are playing both dogs and tigers, K-J-10-9 gives you the same twelve opportunities as does K-Q-J-10. Except when these special hands are played, there is almost no conceivable case in poker in which it is wise to draw to an inside straight.

One of the most frequent and therefore one of the most important situations in a blind-opening game concerns the play of player B (the blind raiser) when one other player has raised and everyone else has dropped. There were \$4 in the pot originally; the raiser put in \$3, making \$7; and player B can stay in for \$1, getting 7 to 1 for his money. Attracted by such odds, most players stay on almost anything. In fact, even in fairly good games it is not unusual to see a player toss in his dollar and draw five cards.

You will note that the odds offered by the pot, 7 to 1, justify drawing one card to a four-flush or an open-ended straight, where the odds are 4 or 5 to 1 against filling; they are still against drawing to an inside straight, where the odds are 11 to 1 against filling; they justify drawing four cards to an ace. Drawing four to an ace is very slightly better than drawing three to an A-K of different suits; about the same as drawing three cards

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

to A-K of the same suit; and considerably better than drawing two cards to a three-card flush possibility, a three-card open-ended straight possibility, or even a three-card straight possibility.

In general, even the 7 to 1 odds justify drawing only when you have an ace; or a K-Q of the same suit (to take advantage of certain freak draws); or three cards in sequence no lower than 10-9-8 (so that if you pair one of your cards you will still have a fair chance to win against an unimproved hand); or three cards of the same suit of which at least two cards are ten or higher. In the long run, very little will be lost if you do not even pay your dollar to draw to less than an ace or a low pair, but of course it is fun to be in there drawing.

LOWBALL

This is a very new game, as poker games go; it is not much more than thirty years old. Its success has been phenomenal in some districts; in the legal games of California, there is probably as much lowball played as regular poker. The game has enriched the language of poker with many new terms: The best hand is a bicycle, or wheel. A relatively good hand of its kind is "smooth" and a relatively bad hand of its kind is "rough." For example, 9-8-6-3-2 is "a rough nine," while 9-5-4-3-2 is "a smooth nine." Lowball introduced the novelties that ace is low rather than high, and that straights and flushes do not count.

There are a few generalities worth stating. A smooth nine is the average winning hand. One-card draws are common and are mathematically sound; two-card draws are almost as common and are almost never mathematically sound.

There is much semi-bluffing in this game. By a semi-bluff I mean a bet on a hand that doesn't figure to be high if the other players have what they represented, but that may scare them out and may even be high. A jack or a rough ten is worth an opening bet against two one-card draws as a semi-bluff. It may prove to be the actual low hand and still get called on suspicion. It may scare out an equivalent hand drawn by one of the opponents. Nevertheless, it must be classed as a bluff and is not the kind of bet to make regularly.

A pat eight is worth a raise before the draw; a seven is worth a bet after the draw. A bicycle or wheel occurs only about once in four hundred hands unless the bug is used, in which case it will occur three or four times as often. Generally speaking, a

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

six-high hand is worth two or three raises (depending on how smooth it is) and one can discount the possibility of running into a wheel until the third raise.

As I said before, lowball is a game of one-card draws. Generally speaking, one should not draw to less than an eight. Lowball is almost always played pass and out before the draw, check free after the draw. Half the time you will find yourself in bad position (one of the first three men after the dealer) and you will have to make a decision without information as to what the other players can do. In such cases, the minimum opening hand is a smooth nine pat, any eight pat, or a one-card draw to a six. Any of these hands plus a one-card draw to a seven is worth a play when someone else has opened. The pat eight is worth a raise. If the pot has been opened and raised before it comes to you, and there are two or three players to speak after you, the minimum hand on which you should stay is a one-card draw to any seven.

Drawing is determined largely by position. You should not stay in when you have a difficult decision to make in drawing and when you must draw cards before most of the other players have been heard from. For example, 9-6-3-2-A is a fine hand to hold in late position, a difficult hand in early position. The hand may win pat. However, if there are two raises before the draw you will assume that it cannot win pat and you must draw one card to your six, and even if there is one raise before the draw you have at best a doubtful quantity if you play the hand pat. Therefore, while you must open on the hand, you do not stand the two raises if you have opened. In a late position you can stand the two raises, because the two raises will draw before you and if they are both one-card draws (because many players do raise on a one-card draw to a six or even a smooth seven) you can stand pat and have a better than even chance of winning.

It is important to remember that the average hand after a draw of one card (regardless of what you are drawing to) is ten high. This hand will not win the average pot. It is about $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 that you will not have, after the draw, a hand as low as your highest card going in. That is, if you draw one card to a 7-5-3-2 it is $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against your winding up with a seven.

There is another consideration that makes lowball absolutely unique among poker games. In every other form of poker, the more players there are in the pot the better odds you are offered

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

and the greater is the incentive to stay in, draw cards, and try to improve. But in lowball, the more players there are in the pot, the worse your chance of improving. Counting the ace as a low card, there are in the pack only 28 cards seven or lower. If you have a legitimate stay on the come, you have four of those cards. Every intelligent player who is also in must have at least three or probably four of those cards, plus one or two of the next-higher cards—nines and eights—that might make a hand playable. This little-considered fact upsets most of the odds that have been published for lowball. If four other players are in ahead of you, and you need a one-card draw, the odds are almost 2 to 1 that you will be painted. (In the peculiar terminology of lowball, this means that you will draw a face card.)' With four other players in the pot, the odds are not 31/2 to 1 against improving but as high as 5 to 1 against improving.

Conversely, the more players stay against you, the better your pat 8 or your smooth 9 pat becomes, because the worse are their chances for improving so as to beat you.

Such figures are never the final guide in poker. You must not only wait to see what those other players, having drawn, will do, you must also then judge the possibility that they are bluffing. This depends upon a knowledge of the players and the exercise of observation in the game. Nevertheless, these general considerations may often make the difference between a winning player and a losing one.

The Bug

Since lowball is usually played with the bug, and other forms of draw poker are often played with the bug (west of the Mississippi, at least) I will digress now to discuss special considerations applying to any game in which the bug is used.

You know, of course, that the bug is the joker; but it is not the joker as an unrestricted wild card. The joker defined as the bug can be used only as an extra ace or to fill a straight or a flush.

In lowball, in which the ace is the lowest card instead of the highest, and in which straights and flushes do not count, the bug occupies a unique position. If there is no ace in the hand, the bug is simply the ace, the lowest card. If there is a natural ace in the hand, the bug never pairs that ace. It simply ranks as the missing card next higher than the ace. Therefore the hand 5-4-3-2-A (natural cards) cannot be beaten by the hand 5-3-2-A-

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

bug. These hands only tie. But a hand 6-5-3-2-A will lose to a hand 6-4-3-bug-A, because the bug can be designated as the missing deuce.

In regular poker, the bug plays a less complicated part. Its rank is never in question. It is simply an ace. However, it does not pair an ace in the same hand if it can be used to make a flush or straight. The ace-bug-7-6-3, all the natural cards being diamonds, are not a pair of aces but a flush, and furthermore they are a double-ace-high flush and will beat A-K-7-6-3 of clubs.

Possession of the bug creates certain problems in drawing and affects your play of certain hands. I will summarize these.

The bug with three cards of the same suit hardly affects the odds on filling a flush; they become 38 to 10 instead of 38 to 9. In general it may be said that if you would drop a four-flush, you should drop the four-flush including the bug.

A bug with three cards in sequence doubles the chances of filling a straight. Three cards in sequence, such as J-10-9, plus the bug, are a sixteen-timer as against an eight-timer on a regular double-ended straight; the odds are slightly less than 2 to 1 against filling the straight and you should play in nearly any pot.

In any hand containing an ace in addition to the bug, the bug should simply be considered another ace. With one lower pair plus the bug but no other ace in the hand, it is better to hold the bug as a kicker and draw two cards than to discard the bug and draw three cards to the pair; with aces up including the bug, it is better to treat the hand simply as aces up and draw one card than to discard the low pair and draw three to the ace and bug. The only exception is when you believe aces up will not win the pot. On a one-card draw the odds are still $8\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against making a full house.

A common problem arises when you have bug, ace, another face card of the same suit as the ace, and two unmatched cards. Here the two-card draw to the bug, ace and face card of the same suit is slightly better than a three-card draw to the ace and bug. The bug turns a modified inside straight (4-6-7, etc.) into a reasonable play in which there are twelve chances to fill and the odds are only 3 to 1 against filling, better than on a regular open-end straight without the bug. A combination such as 4-7-8 with the bug is simply an inside straight turned into the equivalent of an open-end straight without the bug (eight cards that will fill) and is not worth playing unless the pot offers at least

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

5 to 1 and the hand will almost surely win if it fills.

Much depends on whether or not the bug is known to be in play. Two kings are considerably improved by the presence of the bug in the hand, even though you throw it away (as you should; kings-up should win and three kings almost surely will). Two aces are not worth standing a raise, ace-bug are, because the danger of a straight or flush is reduced.

Presence of the bug in your hand (or the rare cases when another player has discarded it or shown it) may affect your estimate of your hand in a big betting situation. For example, you hold 2-2-2-A-bug. You raise before the draw and bet out after the draw. A one-card draw raises you, you reraise, and he raises back. You drop because you have the bug. The least on which he would raise a pat hand is an A-K or a double ace flush, when you have already reraised. Therefore he must have a full house and it must be higher than yours. If your pair were anything but ace-bug, you would certainly call.

HIGH-LOW POKER

This is a game of draw poker in which nothing differs from any other game of draw poker except that the high and the low hands split the pot. In some high-low games, the ace can be treated as the low card in a low hand, but these games are rare and I will consider only the game in which the high hand is reckoned exactly as it would be in any other poker game and the lowest possible hand is 7-5-4-3-2 of different suits. Straights and flushes count and must be treated as high hands.

One error that a high-low player may make is to treat the perfect low hand (7-5-4-3-2) as unbeatable. Such a hand is not more infrequent than a high full house. At least once in the lifetime of the high-low player, he is likely to hold the perfect low when another player also holds the perfect low. If the other player is equally ignorant, they will raise and reraise each other indefinitely, while the high player simply rides along with a cinch. Eventually they will split half the pot, having put in closer to one-third of the pot each, and the "perfect" hand will have wound up with a net loss. I do not intend to imply that a player with a perfect low should not back it strongly, but after four or five raises he should become suspicious. At that point, even if he has another perfect low out against him, if he calls he probably will do no worse than break even.

In high-low draw poker, the low hand will be about the same

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

as the low hand in low-ball, which is described in the preceding section. The high hand will be slightly better than the average high hand in a regular game of draw poker, because there will be occasional cases in which a player draws to low and gets some freak result that gives him a straight or flush.

More than nearly any other kind of poker, this game rewards the player who has good judgment as to what the other players are trying for. Often a player who pairs on a draw to a possible low hand will know from the circumstances that his pair probably gives him the high hand and he can stay in or even raise with great confidence.

The only reasonable way to approach the game is this: Look at your hand. Appraise its probable chances of winning for high. Appraise its possible chances of winning for low. If in either case you feel that you have mathematically the best of it, stay in and play for the kind of hand that is most likely to win in the category, high or low, that you selected originally. In this game, you cannot win both high and low. Let the freak draws take care of themselves, not bothering about them until you are finished. Almost the only time you are playing both ways is when you hold a hand such as 5-4-3-2 or 6-5-4-3, which will give you a probable winning high hand if you hit the straight and a probable winning low hand if you draw a low card.

Just as in regular poker, the average high hand is jacks up or queens up; the average winning low hand is nine high. Almost never is a two-card draw for low worth while unless you are convinced that all the other players are going for high and are paired to begin with. In such a case, a low pair may very readily win low and an unpaired hand is pretty sure to.

DEUCES WILD

Many serious poker players will be horrified that I should discuss this game at all, but it is perhaps the most underrated of all forms of poker—simply because it is played most often by women's afternoon clubs and others who do not take the game seriously.

Actually deuces wild is just as good as any other form of poker and presents its own peculiar problems.

The basis of the game is not to play unless you have at least one deuce, unless occasionally you are dealt three of a kind or better. No two pairs and no single pair without a deuce are worth playing. The average winning hand is three aces. Three

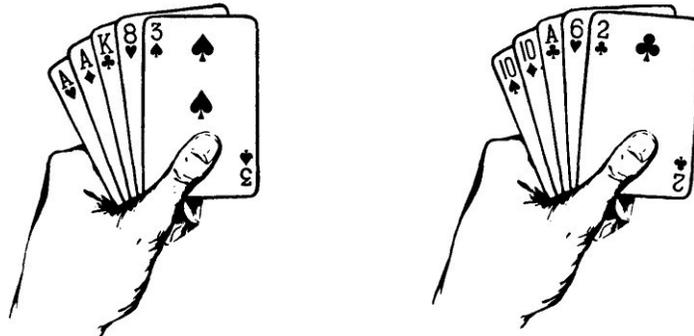
HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

of a kind lower than queens or kings should usually be thrown away fast if you have not improved them. They may win a dull pot, but almost never are they worth a call.

A few problems arise in drawing. With two aces, a deuce, and two honor cards (ten or higher) of the same suit as one of the aces, such as ♠ A Q 10, ♥ A, ♦ A, 2, it is better to draw to the two aces and the deuce than to the royal flush possibility. With a pair lower than kings, a deuce, and a straight flush possibility, such as ♠ A Q 10, ♥ Q, ♣ 2, it is better to draw to the straight

flush; the three or four of a kind may not win. A deuce plus three cards in sequence or three cards of the same suit are worth a play and are worth standing one raise but not two; if there are two or more raises, you should have a straight flush possibility, or if you have a pair and a deuce you should draw in an effort to make at least four of a kind.

The big question is the number of deuces you hold. A pair of deuces is worth a raise and is worth meeting almost any number of other raises. Figure that any deuce you do not hold is likely to be held or drawn by someone else, and get out fast when you do not hold deuces. When drawing to two deuces, hold an ace or king and draw two; throw away any lower cards and draw three.



Holding a Kicker

Playing against one opponent who opened early and drew three cards, hold the king (or a queen) and draw two. He may have aces also.

Against one opponent who raised and drew one card (in a Blind Opening game) hold the ace with the pair and draw two cards.

STUD POKER

Five-card stud poker depends on mathematics and self-discipline. The average winning hand is the lowest among all games of poker—a pair of kings or a pair of aces. Overhead is almost nonexistent; there is almost never an ante, and you do not have to bet unless you have the high card showing on the first round. As a result you can sit in the game for literally hours and hardly spend a penny, waiting for a good hand to come along. The winnings almost always go to the players who are conservative at the start and bold when they think they have the best hands.

Stud poker offers some classic questions, which are easy enough to answer.

1. The idea that you should not play unless you can beat the board—unless you have a better hand than any hand showing, at the stage at which you make the bet. I regret to say that this precept is almost entirely true. It is devastatingly boring, but it is true. You are unlikely to win in a stud game unless you bet only when you can beat anything showing. In all other cases, you should get out of the pot.

2. The question of which is better, an ace in the hole (assuming no other ace showing) or a low pair, say up to fives or sixes. The low pair is much better. If the ace itself is not paired, you have the better hand at the start. You are even more likely to improve the pair than the holder of the ace is to pair the ace. But much depends on how you play a low pair after the first round or two. Probably the best method is to raise on the second round and see how many stay in. From the number who stay in, you can judge the possibility that you are up against other low pairs or high hole cards. From the next round of cards, you can judge the possibility that any of the high hole cards has paired.

Stud poker players are often prejudiced against low pairs back to back because they have lost so much on them. They have not lost by sticking around in the first place—that is when they get their killings if they improve—but by sticking around after it is apparent that some other player in the game has paired and has a higher pair. For example, a pair of fives unimproved is a bad fourth-round play against a strong player who showed an eight on the first round and has drawn an ace or king later and who bets strongly. He probably has you beaten at this point, and if

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

he has you beaten at this point you are going to lose in the long run by bucking him.

3. The one invariable rule of stud poker is not to stay against a pair showing unless you already have a higher pair. The number of "over" cards is of no consequence whatsoever. If he has you beaten at that point, he figures to have you beaten at the end and he also has an advantage that you cannot possibly have—he can have a cinch hand and you cannot. If there is an open pair showing, be very wary of staying even when you have a higher pair. Stop first to consider the possibility that he was paired back to back at the start. This will depend upon your appraisal of the player and his habits, and also on the number of aces that have shown (or of cards higher than the high showing card at the start, as for example when the high showing card at the start was a queen and no kings have shown). A stud poker player must have the courage to get out on the highest showing hand when all the indications are that some concealed hand is better at this point than his hand is.

Don't stay on straight or flush possibilities, unless by pure accident you find yourself with a possible straight or flush with one card yet to come and the pot offers you better than 5 to 1 odds for staying in.

One of the standard precepts of the game is, "Never bet into a possible cinch hand." If you observed this rule you would sacrifice much of your potential winnings. Stud poker is more a game of figuring than any other kind of poker. The opponent may show a possible cinch, such as a possible straight or flush, but you must consider the hole cards on which he might have stayed in so long. You must form your judgment on the hole card he *may* have, rather than on the entire number of possible hole cards there are for him. You then think about whether any of his possible hole cards will cause him to call a bet on a losing hand. When you think you probably can win and also that he may call on a losing hand, you must bet. For example, you have queens up and he probably has tens up but he may have three sixes, as in this case:

Five-card stud. You raised on the second round and took the lead on the third round. At the final round only one opponent has stayed with you.

You have: Q down; 9, Q, 5, 5.

Opponent has: ? down; 10, 6, 8, 6.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

If opponent has a six in the hole he knows he has a cinch hand.

Opponent is high and checks. You must bet your queens up, despite his possible cinch. It is too unlikely that he played at the start with a six in the hole and a ten up. His most likely hands are tens up or merely the sixes he shows, perhaps with an ace or other high hole card. But with either of these hands he can beat your showing fives and with tens up he can beat the nines up that you are likely to have. He will probably call a bet and you will lose much of your potential winnings if you do not give him an opportunity to do so.

Occasionally you must bluff in such cases (when you have represented a hand that is probably two pair, but do not actually have them); and occasionally the opponent will reraise as a bluff and you must trust your judgment of his style to decide whether or not to call. All that is part of the game.

In stud poker you must look at every card dealt and every card folded and must remember them. They affect the chances that any particular opponent has a particular hole card. For example, two aces have shown and folded. You are against one opponent who catches an ace as his last card. You have two kings. You must ask yourself whether he would have continued to stay with an ace when the other two aces had already shown. If he is a very good player, figure him for an early pair and not aces paired on the last card. If he is a poor player, you might worry. But you cannot have any idea if you did not see and take note of those aces that folded. Incidentally, this is an oversimplified case; your success is going to depend on how many of the sixes and nines and queens you see, as well as the aces. Everybody notices aces.

When to play on the first round. The average winning hand is two kings or two aces. Many pots are won on less (such as ace high) and many pots require more, as the upcards will reveal; but it is a basic principle to stay only when the odds against making two kings or better are less than the odds offered by the pot. The following are minimum plays on the first round.

1. Any pair.
2. Ace in the hole; but if another ace is showing, the upcard should be a nine or higher.
3. King in the hole, when no ace is showing. If an ace or another king is showing, the upcard must be jack or queen and

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

no more than one other player can show a queen or jack (as the case may be).

The great fallacy is in staying on a hole card such as jack simply because it is high—that is, in the occasional deals when all the original upcards are low. For example, the first upcards in an eight-handed game are 2, 8, 7, 10, 8, 5, 10, 6. You have the seven up and a jack in the hole. You can "beat the board" but it is a bad play. The odds are 13 to 1 that another player has you beaten.

Raising in five-card stud. There are two arguments against raising early in a stud game. Once you have raised, you will be expected to take the lead from that time on, and you will get only minimum calls from the other players—unless one of them knows he has you beaten and raises back, in which case you are stuck with the odds against you and much of your money in the pot. The second of the two arguments against an early raise is that in most stud games the limit is higher on the last card, and if you can only raise once you might as well wait until your raise will win you the most money.

Now, despite these arguments, one must frequently raise early in a stud game. Following are some of the reasons for an early raise:

1. Assuming that you will soon be spotted as a tight player, the other players will figure you for an ace or a pair anyway. You might as well make them pay to stay around with you, and furthermore a policy of raising will open the way to a number of bluffs that will steal small pots at the beginning. Furthermore, since you are known to play conservatively, an early raise on a pair will put you in a very good position later if you happen to catch a showing ace. A higher pair than yours may very well fold.

2. If you are in good position (last man from the high hand) you may sometimes raise on the third card (the second upcard) to give yourself a free ride on the fourth card (the third upcard). After your early raise, everyone may check to you the next time and you can see your last card free. No doubt you would have had to call at least the minimum bet anyway, to see that last card, and you might have been confronted with one or more raises.

3. Occasionally when you have the second-best hand you may raise to drive the best hand out. This is a first-round raise. An ace that is forced high will not infrequently drop. If a couple

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

of hands with small cards showing have stayed in against the ace, your raise on such a combination as K-Q may drive the ace out and leave you with a better chance to make a higher pair than either of the other players.

In all these cases a primary object is to vary your game. There are two basic ways to keep the opponents guessing in poker. One is to play different kinds of hands in the same way; the other is to play the same kind of hand in different ways. If you are going to play only good hands in stud poker, then you have to play them in different ways so that you cannot be too easily figured.

There is one general exception to the principle of early raising. If the game is wide open, in which the other players bet and raise very freely, there is seldom an occasion for you to raise early. On every round, someone else is pretty sure to bet. The pot will be built up without your help. You might just as well wait until the end and make pretty sure you are going to win before you start putting unnecessary chips into the pot.

The play of an open pair. When you have the only open pair, every other player in the game is at a great disadvantage. You may have a cinch high at the moment and if so it is pretty sure to stand up. Therefore the policy among most stud players is always to bet the maximum on an open pair and make the opponents pay through the nose if they want to try to draw out on it.

In most fairly good stud games, no one is going to stay against an open pair unless he has a higher pair or unless (on the next-to-last card) he has a straight or flush possibility. Even the straight or flush possibility is a pretty bad gamble unless the pot is already big; the pot should offer 5 to 1 odds unless at least three cards in the possible straight or flush are over the showing pair, and even then the pot should offer at least 4 to 1 odds.

In general, I subscribe to the idea of betting the maximum on the open pair, because only such a policy can maintain your chance of making a real killing when you actually do have three of a kind or two pair at the time your open pair shows. Nevertheless, discretion is sometimes the better part of valor. If you know there are likely to be a couple of higher pairs out (and sometimes you can tell this from the previous action) and if you know you aren't going to scare anybody out, you are simply betting a losing hand. If the other players are of the kind who

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

will freely bet or raise on their higher pairs against your open pair, you are risking the loss of a considerable amount of money. In such cases it is no disgrace even to check the open pair; it is stubbornness never to do so. And, of course, you can still mix up your game by checking occasionally when the open pair has actually given you a cinch hand.

In any event, you are under no obligation to bet the open pair on the last round. That is usually the time when you bet only when you do have the winning hand and when you figure the other players to be too smart to bet into you.

As for playing against an open pair: You know, of course, that it is always dangerous. I am speaking only of the times when you have a higher pair, concealed of course. Only a losing player bets because he has a number of "over" cards which if paired will beat the showing pair. Except as a bluff, such hands should be dropped. In most cases, the higher pair must not be dropped, but it is losing play to raise on it. The only time you raise is when you are alone with the open pair, you have a lower limit before the last card, and you want to coax the open pair into checking to you on the last card. A bet by the only pair on the last round puts every other player on a terrible spot. There are few more effective bluffs against good players, because everyone knows that when a tight player gets a pair showing there is a very good chance that he has two pair or better.

Watching other cards. It takes a pretty good stud player to watch all the cards and draw the proper conclusions from them. Every player, however, can watch for the cards that most affect his hand. Sometimes simple observation leads you to some valuable conclusions. Suppose you have neither the temperament nor the aptitude for concentration to watch and remember every card, but you have observed the cards in general and have noticed that a lot of spades have shown. If you have a doubtful play on a spade four-flush for the last card, this observation will cause you to drop fast. If you have noticed an absence of showing spades, the fact might persuade you to stay in on the four-flush when otherwise you might have dropped it.

Much more important is to watch every card that pairs one of your cards. The appearance of those cards has a tremendous effect on your chances. For example, if you have an ace in the hole and no other ace has shown, the odds are 4 to 1 against your pairing it eventually; if one ace has shown, the odds go up to more than 6 to 1 against you. If two other aces have

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

shown, for all practical purposes your ace is valueless except as a high card.

SEVEN-CARD STUD

In this game the average winning hand is a fair three of a kind, such as three eights or three tens. There are quite a few straights and flushes. The worst mistakes made by the average player are: staying on a low pair, such as fours or fives; and staying more than one round on a straight or flush possibility.

If there is another principal mistake, it probably is in playing a two-pair hand too strongly—unless you get your two pair on the first four cards, in which case the odds are only about $21\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against filling.

The nature of the game is such that there is a lot of difference between a concealed low pair and a split low pair. (A concealed low pair is, for example, two fours down and a king up; a split low pair is a four and king down and a four up.) Of course, your chance of improving is the same in both cases, but your chance of getting a big pot is far better with the concealed pair. In seven-card stud it is quite easy to have a full house with no pairs showing, and when you have such a hand a player with a straight or flush is very likely to bet into you, raise you, and ultimately call you, and you will win a big pot. With a split pair, if you make three of a kind early you show a pair and the other players are automatically on guard. If the case card of that rank doesn't soon show, the other players must even keep in mind the danger that you have four of a kind, and while this may put you in a good bluffing position occasionally, that is far less important than the fact that it will prevent your getting any action.

Legitimate plays in this game, on the first three cards (two down, one up) are roughly as follows: Any three cards of the same suit. Any three cards in sequence as good as 10-9-8. Any high pair, nines or better. Any concealed low pair. Occasionally, A-K in the hole if not more than one card of either rank (one ace, or one king, but not one of each) has shown.

The entire key to the game comes when the fourth card has been dealt, so that you have two up and two down. At this point much depends, as it always must in any stud game, on what cards have shown around the table; but the following general principles should be observed.

An unimproved low pair should be dropped. The only ex-

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

ception is the case in which the other two cards include an ace or a king and queen and in which not more than one of each of these ranks has shown. By a low pair here, I mean eights or lower.

A straight possibility should be dropped unless you have drawn a near card (as for example, a king or seven to a J-10-9) or unless you have paired. However, if two essential cards have shown, such as two eights or two queens in the case noted, the hand should be dropped.

A flush possibility should be dropped if the fourth card has not matched it, unless most of the cards of the same suit have not shown; or unless the flush cards are very high, including ace and king or queen; or the fourth card has paired the hand.

A high pair, queens or higher, should be played unless there is a great deal of action in the betting, with two players raising.

A pair should not be played against a higher open pair unless the hand offers also a straight or flush possibility.

Neither two pair nor a low three of a kind justifies a raise against a high open pair. However, if no pair is showing then two pair or better in the first four cards calls for a maximum bet or a raise. The principle is not much different from that of draw poker. The odds against filling are only $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 and rare will be the cases in which the pot offers smaller odds than that. The hand is probably the best at the moment. The bet or raise will drive out hands that might have improved.

The best two pairs to have at such a time are near cards, such as 10-8 down and 10-8 up. Opponents may then figure that the raise was made on some such combination as J-10-9-8. If later you fill and also get a card that looks as though it may have made you a straight, you may get a tremendous play from a flush and win a big pot.

The raise on such a two-pair hand is especially effective because any double-ended straight or any four-flush made in the first four cards is worth a maximum bet or raise and two or more reraises if the opportunity arises (only one reraise against an open pair that raises back). It is about even that you will fill the straight or flush in the next three cards and the odds are $2\frac{1}{2}$ or better to 1 that you will win if you do.

Stubbornness and overoptimism are the main hazards to the player of seven-card stud. Very rare are the hands that can win without improvement. You might almost say that nothing less than a high three of a kind in the first three cards are likely to

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

win without improvement. The winning player must stay at the start when he has a good draw but must drop fast if he has not improved by at least the fifth card. To stick around with aces, against three or four other players, is futile. Hands run so high in this game that one of the other players almost surely has a better hand. In every form of poker, one cannot remember too often that the best hand going in figures to be the best hand coming out.

The tactics of betting and raising in seven-card stud are almost exactly the same as in five-card stud; the only difference is that one can seldom be nearly so sure of having the winning hand, because with three cards down at the end the hidden combinations are almost innumerable. Early raises are about the same in one game as in the other. Bets and raises on the last card are somewhat more dangerous in seven-card stud. Bluffing is less effective on the last card because it is so hard to know when a player may have a legitimate call, regardless of what he has represented in the past.

SEVEN-CARD HIGH-LOW STUD

Perhaps this game is important to only a few players, but to them it is very important. In the world of celebrities—society, motion pictures, radio and television, publishers and authors—it has been the most important form of poker for some twenty years.

More than any other form of poker that I know, this is a game of principle and of observation. The principle can be briefly expressed: Play for low, and let the high hands take care of themselves. Some fine players have expressed the principle that the only high hand worth staying on originally is three of a kind in the first three cards, and this happens so seldom that it couldn't greatly affect your winnings if you never got such a hand. Three cards offering both straight and flush possibilities, such as J-9-7 of diamonds, are worth a play; good later results may give you a seven-high or a straight flush, in addition to the regular high hands you can make.

The matter of observation is one that cannot be rated too highly. The winning player must observe very closely, remember the cards, and figure closely. At the showdown, one must figure all the possible combinations of cards that each opponent may have in the hole, and what each combination will give him. This must then be adjusted to the previous play and known

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

habits of the player; to the cards that have shown and probably can be eliminated from consideration; and to the cards that other players probably hold to justify their betting and so cannot be held by the player in question. All of this requires a certain special aptitude, and either you have it or you don't.

In this game, at the end each player selects five of his cards as high and five of his cards as low. He does not have to make a declaration and he does not have to limit himself to playing for one, the other, or both. As a result, close figuring will often reveal a case in which you cannot lose and may win. If your opponent has a certain combination of cards in the hole, you can beat him for high; if he has another combination, you can beat him for low; and conceivably (though only if he is an idiot, a type that occurs quite frequently in poker) you may be able to beat him for both. In any such case, a player simply bets the maximum and raises to the end of time. Actually, this game is almost always played with table stakes and so the best a player can do is to bet all he has or all his opponent has, depending on which has the higher stack.

One word of warning to smart readers: Time after time, a player has arrived at the brilliant conclusion that since everyone else in the game is starting off to play for low, he will play for high and win more than his share of pots, even though he can never win more than half a pot. One by one these players, without exception, have slunk out of the game with their tails between their legs. *Every* successful player has concluded that you must play for low, and you would be wise to take their word for it.

Playing for low, the proper minimum for a stay at the start is three cards eight or lower with no pair, or two cards five or lower. As usually played, this game treats the ace as a high card (except, of course, in the straight 5-4-3-2-A), so the perfect low hand is 7-5-4-3-2.

LAWS OF POKER

There are several worthy sets of poker laws (see page 11). It is not so important that players adopt any particular set of laws as that they adopt some set of written laws and follow it strictly. If players wish to add house rules or special customs it is their privilege to do so but these too should be written. The following laws are recommended because experience has shown that they answer virtually any question that is likely to arise in a poker game.

The laws have three main sections: General laws, applying to all forms of poker; laws applying to draw or closed poker; and laws applying to stud or open poker.

PENALTIES for breaches of law represent a problem that has never been satisfactorily solved in any poker laws. A penalty can punish an offender but it cannot restore the rights of players who were damaged by the irregularity. Therefore no penalties are provided by the following laws; in extreme cases the players can constitute themselves a kangaroo court and make some equitable adjustment, but generally the following laws are confined to rectification rather than penalization of irregularities.

General Laws

(This section covers the pack of cards; the rank of hands; the shuffle, cut, and deal; the betting; and the showdown.)

1. *Players.* Poker may be played by two to ten players. In every form of poker each plays for himself.

2. *Object of the game.* The object of poker is to win the pot, either by having the best poker hand (as explained below) or by making a bet that no other player meets.

3. (a) *The pack.* The poker pack consists of 52 cards, divided in four suits: spades (♠), hearts (♥), diamonds (♦), clubs (♣). In each suit there are thirteen cards: A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2.

(b) *Joker.* The joker may be added to the pack as a wild card.

(c) *Wild cards.* The joker or any other card or class of cards may be designated as wild by any of the following methods. The method must be selected in advance by the players in the game.

(1) The wild card may be designated by its holder to repre-

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

sent any other card that its holder does not have.

(2) The joker (in this case called the bug) may be designated by its holder to represent a fifth ace or any card needed to complete a straight, a flush, or any special hand such as a dog, cat, etc.

(3) Any wild card may represent any other card, whether or not the holder of the wild card also has the card designated. [This permits double- or even triple-ace-high flushes, etc.] A wild card, properly designated, ranks exactly the same as a natural card.

4. *Rank of cards.* (a) A (high), K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2; A (low) only in the sequence 5-4-3-2-A.

(b) *Optional.* The ace may rank low in low poker (lowball) or in high-low poker. When the ace is by agreement designated as low:

(1) In low poker, the ace is always low, so that A-A is a lower pair than 2-2.

(2) In high-low poker, the holder must designate the relative rank of the ace at the time that he shows his hand in the show down, e.g., by saying "aces high" (in which case A-A beats K-K for high) or "aces low" (in which case A-A beats 2-2 for low but loses to 2-2 for high).

(c) In any pot to be won by the high hand, the ranking follows subsection (a) of this law, so that for example between two little dogs, 7-6-4-3-2 beats 7-5-4-3-2.

5. *Seating.* (a) Players take seats at random unless any player demands, before the game begins, that the seats of the respective players be determined as provided in the next paragraph.

(b) When any player demands a reseating, the banker has first choice of seats. The first dealer (see paragraph 7) either may take the seat to left of the banker or may participate with the other players in having his position determined by chance. The dealer then shuffles the pack, has the cards cut by the player to his right, and deals one card face up to each player in rotation beginning with the player at his left. The player thus dealt the highest-ranking card sits at the right of the banker, the player with the next-highest card at the right of that player, and so on. If two players are dealt cards of the same rank, the card dealt first ranks higher than the other.

(c) After the start of the game no player may demand a reseating unless at least one hour has elapsed since the last reseating.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

ing. A player entering the game after it begins must take any vacant seat. A player replacing another player must take the seat vacated by that player. Two players may exchange seats, after any showdown and before the next deal begins, provided no other player objects.

(d) When there is no banker, the dealer has first choice of seats.

6. *The shuffle and cut.* Any player on demand may shuffle the pack before the deal. The pack should be shuffled three times in all, by one or more players. The dealer has the right to shuffle last and should shuffle the pack at least once.

(b) The dealer offers the shuffled pack to his right-hand opponent, who may cut it or not as he pleases. If this player does not cut, any other player may cut. If more than one player demands the right to cut, the one nearest the dealer's right hand shall cut. Except in case of an irregularity necessitating a new cut, the pack is cut only once.

(c) The player who cuts divides the pack into two or three portions, none of which shall contain fewer than five cards, and completes the cut by placing the packet that was originally bottom-most on top. [If a card is exposed in cutting, the pack must be shuffled by the dealer and cut again. Irregularities requiring a new shuffle and cut are covered on page 81.]

7. *The deal.* (a) At the start of the game any player shuffles a pack and deals the cards face up, one at a time to each player in rotation beginning with the player at his left, until a jack is turned up. The player to whom the jack falls is the first dealer. Thereafter, the turn to deal passes from each player to the player at his left. A player may not voluntarily pass his turn to deal.

(b) The dealer distributes the cards from the top of the pack, one card at a time to each player in clockwise rotation, beginning with the player at his left and ending with himself.

8. *Rank of hands.* Poker hands rank, from highest to lowest:

(a) Straight flush—five cards of the same suit in sequence. The highest straight flush is A, K, Q, J, 10 of the same suit, called a royal flush. The lowest straight flush is 5, 4, 3, 2, A of the same suit. As between two straight flushes, the one headed by the highest card wins. [When any card of the pack is designated as wild—see 3 (c)—a straight flush loses to five of a kind, which is the highest possible hand.]

(b) Four of a kind—four cards of the same rank. This hand

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

loses to a straight flush but beats any other hand. As between two hands each containing four of a kind, the four higher-ranking cards win. [When there are several wild cards, it is possible for two players to hold four of a kind of the same rank. In this case, the winning hand is the one with the higher-ranking fifth card.]

(c) Full house—three cards of one rank and two cards of another rank. As between two full houses, the one with the higher-ranking three of a kind is the winner. [When there are several wild cards, two players may have full houses in which the three-of-a-kind holdings are of the same rank; the higher of the pairs then determines the winning hand.]

(d) Flush—five cards of the same suit. As between two flushes, the one containing the highest card wins. If the highest cards are of the same rank, the higher of the next-highest cards determines the winning hand, and so on; so that ♠ A K 4 3 2 beats ♥ A Q J 10 8, and ♠ J 9 8 6 4 beats ♥ J 9 8 6 3.

(e) Straight—five cards, in two or more suits, ranking consecutively; as 8, 7, 6, 5, 4. The ace is high in the straight A, K, Q, J, 10 and low in the straight 5, 4, 3, 2, A. As between two straights, the one containing the highest card wins, so that 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 beats 5, 4, 3, 2, A.

(f) Three of a kind—three cards of the same rank. As between two hands each containing three of a kind, the one with the higher-ranking three of a kind wins. [When there are several wild cards, there may be two hands containing identical threes of a kind. In such cases, the highest-ranking unmatched card determines the winner. If these cards are of the same rank, the higher-ranking fifth card in each hand determines the winner.]

(g) Two pairs—two cards of one rank and two cards of another rank, with an unmatched fifth card. As between two hands each containing two pairs, the one with the highest pair wins. If the higher pairs are of the same rank, the one with the higher-ranking second pair wins. If these pairs too are of the same rank, the hand containing the higher of the unmatched cards is the winner.

(h) One pair—two cards of the same rank, with three unmatched cards. Of two one-pair hands, the one containing the higher pair wins. As between two hands containing pairs of the same rank, the highest unmatched card determines the winner; if these are the same, the higher of the second-highest unmatched cards, and if these are the same, the higher of the

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

lowest unmatched cards. For example, 8, 8, 9, 5, 3 beats 8, 8, 9, 5, 2.

(i) No pair. This loses to any hand having a pair or any higher-ranking combination. As between two no-pair hands, the one containing the highest card wins; if these two cards are tied, the next-highest card decides, and so on, so that A, 8, 7, 4, 3 loses to A, 9, 7, 4, 3 but wins from A, 8, 7, 4, 2.

Two hands that are identical, card for card, are tied, since the suits have no relative rank in poker.

9. *Betting*, (a) All the chips bet go into the center of the table, forming the pot. Before putting any chips in the pot, a player in turn announces whether he is betting, calling, or raising; and, if he is betting or raising, how much. A player may not raise by any amount less than the bet he calls, unless there is only one player besides himself in the pot.

(b) If every player in turn, including the dealer, passes, there is a new deal by the next player in rotation and the ante (if any) is repeated. If any player bets, each player in turn after him must either call, or raise, or drop.

(c) In each betting interval, the turn to bet begins with the player designated by the rules of the variant being played, and moves to each active player to the left. A player may neither pass nor bet until the active player nearest his right has put the correct number of chips into the pot or has discarded his hand.

(1) In draw poker, the first in turn before the draw is the player nearest the dealer's left. The first in turn after the draw is the player who made the first bet before the draw, or, if he has dropped, the active player nearest his left.

(2) In stud poker, the first in turn in each betting interval is the player whose exposed cards are higher than those of any other player. If two or more players have identical high holdings, the one nearest dealer's left is first in turn. In the first betting interval, the high player must make a minimum bet. In any later betting interval, he may check without betting.

(d) Unless a bet has been made in that betting interval, an active player in turn may check, which means that he elects to remain an active player without betting. [In some variants of poker, checking is specifically prohibited.]

(e) If any player bets, each active player in turn after him (including players who checked originally) must either drop, or call, or raise.

(f) No player may check, bet, call, raise, or drop, except in his

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

proper turn. A player in turn may drop even when he has the privilege of checking. At any time that a player discards his hand, or permits it to be mixed with any discard, he is deemed to drop and his hand may not be reclaimed.

(g) Whenever only one active player remains, though every other player's having dropped, the active player wins the pot without showing his hand and there is a new deal by the next dealer in turn.

(h) No two players may play in partnership, and there may be no agreement between two or more players to divide a pot.

10. *The showdown.* When each player has either called the highest previous bet, without raising, or has dropped; or when every active player has checked; the full hand of every active player is placed face up on the table and the highest-ranking hand wins the pot. If two or more hands tie for the highest rank, they divide the pot evenly, an odd chip going to the player who last bet or raised.

Irregularities

11. *Redeal.* Any player, unless he has intentionally seen the face of any card required to be dealt to him face down, may call for a new shuffle, cut, and deal by the same dealer if it is ascertained, before the dealer begins dealing the second round of cards, that:

- (1) a card was exposed in cutting;
- (2) the cut left fewer than five cards in either packet;
- (3) two or more cards are faced in the pack;
- (4) the pack is incorrect or imperfect in any way [see paragraphs 3(a), 14, and 15.]
- (5) a player is dealing out of turn (see next paragraph).

If a player is dealing out of turn, and a redeal is called, the deal reverts to the proper player in turn. In a game in which every player antes, no one need ante again. Any other bet that has been put in the pot is forfeited to the pot. If no redeal or misdeal is called within the time limit provided, the deal stands as regular and the player at the left of the out-of-turn dealer will be the next dealer in turn.

12. *Misdeal.* A misdeal—one due to the dealer's error—loses the deal, if attention is drawn to it by a player who has not intentionally seen any face-down card dealt to him. The deal passes to the next player in turn. Any ante made solely by the dealer is forfeited to the pot. If all players have anted equally,

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

their antes remain in the pot and no one need ante again. A blind bet or raise may be withdrawn. A misdeal may be called:

(a) by any player who has not intentionally seen any face down card dealt to him, if before the dealer begins the second round of cards it is ascertained that the pack was not shuffled or was not offered for a cut;

(b) by any player to whom the dealer gives two face-up cards in draw poker or any other form of closed poker, provided that player has not intentionally seen any face-down card dealt to him and has not contributed to the error; and provided he calls for the misdeal immediately;

(c) if the dealer gives too many cards to more than one player.

If the dealer stops dealing before giving every player enough cards, due solely to his omission to deal one or more rounds, it is not a misdeal and the dealer is required to complete the deal whenever the irregularity is discovered. [For example, if the dealer stops dealing after giving each player only four cards; or if the dealer gives the first five of seven players five cards each and the sixth and seventh players only four cards each, having stopped dealing after the fifth player on the last round.]

If the dealer deals too many hands, he shall determine which hand is dead, and that hand is discarded; but if any player has looked at any face-down card in any hand, he must keep that hand.

If the dealer deals too few hands, he must give his own hand to the first omitted player to his left. Any other player who has been omitted and who has anted may withdraw his ante.

13. *Exposed card.* (a) If the dealer exposes one or more cards from the undealt portion of the pack, after the deal is completed, those cards are dead and are placed among the discards. (See also stud poker, paragraph 35 on page 90.)

(b) There is no penalty against any player for exposing any part of his hand, and he has no redress. A player who interferes with the deal and causes the dealer to expose a card may not call a misdeal.

(c) Each player is responsible for his own hand and has no redress if another player causes a card in it to be exposed.

14. *Incorrect pack.* If it is ascertained at any time before the pot has been taken in that the pack has too many cards, too few cards, or a duplication of cards, the deal is void and each player withdraws from the pot any chips he contributed to it,

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

any other laws of the game to the contrary notwithstanding; but the results of pots previously taken in are not affected.

15. *Imperfect pack.* If the pack contains any card that is torn, discolored or otherwise marked so as to be identifiable from its back, the pack must be replaced before the deal in progress or any other deal can be completed; but the play of the pot in progress is not affected if the deal has been completed.

16. *Incorrect hand.* A hand having more or less than five cards (or any other number of cards designated as a player's hand in the poker variant being played) is foul and cannot win the pot. If every other player has dropped, the pot remains and goes to the winner of the next pot. [Players may agree that a hand with fewer than five cards is not foul, in which case its holder may compete for the pot with the best poker combination he can make with the cards he has.]

17. *Irregularities in betting.* Chips once put in the pot may not be withdrawn except:

(a) By a player who, after he has anted, is dealt out—see paragraph 12 on page 82;

(b) In jackpots, when another player has opened without proper openers—see paragraph 30(c) on page 87;

(c) In draw poker, by the players who opened or raised blind, in case of a misdeal—see paragraph 12 on pages 81-82;

(d) In stud poker, when the dealer has failed to deal a player any card face down—see paragraph 34 on page 90.

18. *Installment or string bets.* A player's entire bet must be put in the pot at one time. Having put in any number of chips, he may not add to that number unless the original number was insufficient to call, in which case he may add exactly enough chips to call. If, however, he announced before putting in any chips that he was raising by a certain amount, and he puts in an amount insufficient for such a raise, he must on demand supply enough additional chips to equal the announced amount of his bet.

19. *Insufficient bet.* When a player in turn puts into the pot a number of chips insufficient to call, he must either add enough chips to call and may not raise; or he must drop and forfeit chips already put in the pot. When a player raises by less than the minimum permitted, he is deemed to have called and any additional chips he put into the pot are forfeited to it.

20. *Bet above limit.* If a player puts in the pot more chips

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

than are permitted by the limit, it stands as a bet of the limit and additional chips are forfeited to the pot. An exception is made in table stakes, when a player's bet exceeds the number of chips an opponent has; in that event, the player may withdraw the excess and either bet it in a side pot, or, if there are no other players willing or able to meet that bet in the side pot, restore those chips to his stack.

21. *Announcement in turn of intention to pass or bet.* If a player in turn announces that he passes or drops, his announcement is binding on him whether or not he discards his hand. If a player in turn announces a bet but does not put any chips in the pot, he is bound by his announcement and must if able supply such additional chips as are necessary to bring his bet up to the announced amount. In any event, other players who rely upon an announcement of intention do so at their own risk and have no redress in case under these rules the announcement need not be made good. [In many circles it is considered unethical to announce any intention and then not make good on it.]

22. *Announcement out of turn of intention to pass or bet.* If a player out of turn announces his intention to pass or drop when his turn comes, but does not actually discard his hand; or to make a certain bet, but does not actually put any chips in the pot; his announcement is void and he may take any action he chooses when his turn comes. Any other player who acts in reliance upon the announcement does so at his own risk and has no redress. [As in the case of paragraph 21, above, failure to make good on such an announcement, and especially if the announcement was intentionally misleading, is in many circles considered unethical.]

23. *Bet out of turn.* If a player puts any chips in the pot out of turn, they remain there and the play reverts to the player whose turn it was. If any player to the offender's left puts chips in the pot, he has bet out of turn and is equally an offender. When the offender's turn comes, if the chips he put in were insufficient to call, he may add enough chips to call; if the amount was exactly sufficient to call, he is deemed to have called; if the amount was more than enough to call, he is deemed to have raised by the amount of the excess but cannot add chips to increase the amount of his raise; if no player before him has bet, he is deemed to have bet the number of chips he put in

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

and any amount above the agreed limit is forfeited to the pot. If the chips he put in were insufficient to call he may forfeit these chips and drop. He may never add chips to raise or to increase his raise.

24. *Pass out of turn.* The pass (act of dropping) out of turn is among the most damaging of poker improprieties, but there is no penalty therefor except by agreement of the players. In any case the offender's hand is dead and he cannot win the pot.

25. *Irregularities in the showdown, (a) Hand misstated.* If a player in the showdown announces a hand he does not actually hold, his announcement is void if attention is called to the error at any time before the pot has been taken in by any player (including the player who miscalled his hand). ["The cards speak for themselves."]

(b) *Designation of wild cards.* If in the showdown a player orally designates the suit or rank of a wild card in his hand, or implies such designation by announcing a certain hand, he may not change that designation (e.g. an announcement of Joker-J-10-9-8 as "jack-high straight" fixes the joker as a seven). A player may always show his hand without announcement and need not designate the value of a wild card unless another active player demands that he do so.

(c) *Concession of a pot.* A player who has discarded his hand after another player's announcement of a higher hand may not later claim the pot even if the announcement is determined to have been incorrect.

DRAW POKER

26. *The Draw, (a)* When each player has exactly called the highest previous bet, without raising, or has dropped, the first betting interval ends. The dealer picks up the undealt portion of the pack, and each active player in turn to his left may discard one or more cards, whereupon the dealer gives him that number of cards, face down, from the top of the pack. A player need not draw unless he so chooses.

(b) If the dealer is an active player, he must announce how many cards, if any, he is drawing. At any time following the draw and before the first player in turn bets or checks in the final betting interval, any active player may ask any other active player how many cards he drew. The latter player must answer, but the questioner has no redress if the answer is incorrect. [It is considered unethical, however, to give an incorrect answer intentionally.]

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

(c) The dealer may not serve the bottom card of the pack. If the pack exclusive of this card does not suffice for the draw, the dealer must assemble all cards previously discarded, plus the bottom card of the original pack; shuffle these cards; offer them for a cut; and continue dealing. The cut shall be as provided in paragraph 6 (b) except that only an active player may cut. The opener's discards and the discards of any player yet to draw are excluded from the new pack if they have been kept separate and can be identified.

27. *Irregularities in the draw, (a) Wrong number of cards.* If the dealer gives a player more or less cards than he asks for in the draw, the error must be corrected if the player calls attention to it before he has looked at any of the cards. Unless a card has been served to the next active player in turn, the dealer must correct the error by supplying another card or restoring the excess to the top of the pack, as the case may be. If the next player has been served, the player may discard from his hand additional cards to accept an excess draw without going over a five-card hand; if he has already discarded and the draw is insufficient to restore his hand to five cards, his hand is foul. If the player has looked at any card of the draw and the entire draw would give him an incorrect number of cards, his hand is foul.

(b) *Card exposed.* If any card is exposed in the draw, whether or not it was faced in the pack, the player must accept the first such card but any additional exposed card to be dealt to him is dead and is placed among the discards. After the dealer has served all other active players, he serves additional cards due the player from the top of the pack.

(c) *Draw out of turn.* If a player allows a player at his left to draw out of turn, he must play without drawing, or drop. If he has already discarded any card, his hand is foul.

(d) A player may correct a slip of the tongue in stating the number of cards he wishes to draw, but only provided the dealer has not yet given him the number of cards he first requested.

(e) If a player discards a number of cards that would make his hand incorrect after the dealer gives him as many cards as he asked for, his hand is foul.

28. *Showing openers.* The player who opens must prove that he held a legal hand of five cards including the strength (if any) required to open. If he is in the showdown he must show his

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

entire hand face up. In any other case, before discarding his entire hand he must show his openers face up and his remaining cards, if any, face down.

29. *Splitting openers.* The player who opened may split his openers (discard one or more cards essential to them) and he need not announce that he does so. He may put his discard in the pot, face down, for reference later. [For example, having opened with ♠ Q, ♥ Q J 10 9, he may discard the ♠ Q and draw one card. It is not customary for the opener to put his discard in the pot, since he can usually demonstrate to the other players' satisfaction that he held openers.]

30. *False openers,* (a) If it is ascertained at any time that a player opened without proper openers, or that his hand contains too many cards, his hand is foul and all chips he has bet are forfeited to the pot.

(b) If false openers are discovered before the draw, any other player in turn to the offender's left (excluding those who passed in their first turns) may open and play continues; but any player except the offender may withdraw from the pot any chips he put in after the pot was falsely opened. If no one can open, the remainder of the pot remains for the next deal.

(c) If false openers are discovered after every player but the offender has dropped, each other player may withdraw from the pot any chips he put in after the pot was falsely opened.

(d) If false openers are discovered after the draw, and when any active player remains, play continues and the pot goes to the highest hand at the showdown, whether or not any player had openers. [If there is no hand at the showdown that is not foul, the pot remains and goes to the winner of the next pot. Regardless of other circumstances, a hand that has dropped can never win a pot.]

STUD POKER

31. *Betting in stud poker,* (a) In each betting interval the player with the highest exposed combination (as defined by paragraph 32) has the privilege of betting first. In the first betting interval, this player must bet at least the minimum established for the game. In any subsequent betting interval, this player may check.

(b) If in any betting interval every active player checks, the betting interval ends. Another round of cards is dealt, or there is a showdown, as the case may be. If in any betting interval

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

any player bets, each active player in turn after him must at least call the highest previous bet or drop.

(c) At the start of each betting interval the dealer must announce which player bets first, naming the combination that gives such player the high exposed holding at that point (for example, "Pair of eights bets" or "First ace bets"). The dealer should also announce, after the third and fourth face-up cards are dealt, any player's combination that, when combined with his hole card, may make a one-card draw to a flush or straight (announced by saying "Possible flush" or "Possible straight").

[*Optional law.* In the final betting interval, a player may not check or call unless his full hand, including his hole card, will beat the exposed cards of the highest combination showing. Such player may, however, bet or raise. This rule, which is not recommended, is designed to protect players against making pointless calls; at the same time, it eliminates some bluffing opportunities. Like other optional rules, it should not apply unless there has been prior agreement among the players in the game that it will.]

32. *Incomplete hands*, (a) Four or fewer exposed cards, for the purpose of establishing the first bettor in any betting interval, rank from highest to lowest as follows:

(1) Four of a kind; as between two such hands, the four higher-ranking cards are high.

(2) Three of a kind; as between two such hands, the higher-ranking three of a kind are high.

(3) Two pair; as between two such hands, the highest pair determines the high hand, and if the highest pairs are the same, the higher of the two lower pairs.

(4) One pair; as between two such hands, the higher pair is high; if two hands have the identical pair, the highest unmatched card determines the high hand, and if they are identical the higher of the two other cards.

(5) The highest card; if two players tie for highest card, the next-highest card in their respective hands determines the high hand, and so on.

(b) As between two holdings that are identical card for card, the one nearest the dealer's left is high for purposes of betting (but has no superiority over the other in the showdown).

[Flush and straight combinations of four or fewer cards have no higher rank, for determining the first bettor, than any other holdings including no pair; except when a four flush is played

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

to beat a pair, in which case a fourflush showing bets ahead of a pair.]

(c) If through the dealer's or his own error a player has all his cards exposed, all are taken into consideration for establishing the first bettor; and if at the start of the final betting interval such player has a straight, flush, full house or straight flush showing, his hand outranks any combination of exposed cards that his hand would beat in a showdown.

33. *Irregularities in dealing stud poker*, (a) At any time before the dealer begins dealing the second round of cards, a player who has not looked at a card dealt face-down to him may call for a new shuffle, cut, and deal if it is ascertained that:

- (1) the pack was not shuffled or cut;
- (2) a card was exposed in cutting, or the cut left fewer than five cards in either packet;
- (3) two or more cards are faced in the pack;
- (4) the pack is incorrect or imperfect in any way;
- (5) a player is dealing out of turn.

When there is a redeal, the same dealer deals again unless he was dealing out of turn, in which case the deal reverts to the proper player in turn.

(b) If the dealer deals too many hands, he shall determine which hand is dead, and that hand is discarded; but a player who has looked at the hole card of any hand must keep that hand.

(c) If the dealer deals too few hands, he must give his own hand to the first omitted player to his left.

(d) If the dealer gives a player two face-down cards instead of one on the first round of dealing, he omits that player on the second round of dealing and (unless the rules of the game require two hole cards, as in seven-card stud) he turns up one of the cards. The player who received the two cards may not look at them and then turn up one of them.

(e) If the dealer gives a player more than two cards on the first round of dealing, that player may require a redeal if he does so before the second round of dealing has begun. If the error is not noted until later, his hand is dead.

(f) If in dealing any round of face-up cards the dealer omits a player, he moves back the cards dealt later, so as to give each player the face-up card he would have had if no irregularity had occurred; except that if attention is not called to the irreg-

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

ularity before the first bet is made in the ensuing betting interval, the hand of the player who was omitted is dead.

34. *Exposed card.* If the dealer gives any player a hole card face up, the player must keep that card and instead receive his next card face down. The player has no redress, except to receive his next card face down, unless the dealer repeatedly fails to correct the error until the player has four cards; at which point, if the dealer has never given him a face-down card, the player may if he wishes drop out, withdrawing from the pot all chips he has put in. If the player instead stays for his fifth card, and receives it also face up, he may withdraw his chips from the pot; but the player may instead remain in the pot.

35. *Dead cards.* A card found faced in the pack during any round of dealing must be dealt to the player to whom it falls. A card at the top of the pack exposed during a better interval, either because it is faced in the pack or because it is prematurely dealt, is discarded. In dealing the next round of face-up cards, the dealer skips the player to whom such card would have fallen, and deals in rotation, ending with the last player who would have received the exposed card if it had not been exposed. In each subsequent round of cards, on demand of any player the dealer must begin the rotation with the player who would otherwise have received the top card.

36. *Impossible call.* If the player last to speak in the final betting interval calls a bet when his five cards, regardless of his hole card, cannot possibly beat the four showing cards of the player whose bet he calls, his call is void and the chips may be retracted provided any player calls attention to his error before the hole card of any other active player is shown.

37. If the dealer errs in calling the value of a hand or in designating the high hand, no player has any redress; but if the first bet is made by the player incorrectly designated by the dealer, it is not a bet out of turn.

38. The dealer does not have the option of dealing a player's first card up and his second card down intentionally. A player may not turn up his hole card and receive his next card face down; if he turns up his hole card, he must play throughout with all his cards exposed.

BETTING LIMITS

39. *Table stakes, (a)* In any poker game except one with fixed

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

limits, *i.e.*, in any pot limit, doubling-up or no-limit game, a player who has not enough chips to call the preceding bets and who cannot obtain more chips may stay in for the showdown by betting all the chips he has left. If there are other players in the pot and they wish to continue betting, their bets above this amount go in a "side pot" in which the short player has no interest. Play continues normally until there is a showdown, when the player who was short competes on even terms for that part of the pot to which he contributed in full.

(b) A player in a table stakes game may obtain additional chips from the banker, and add them to his stack on the table, only in the period between a showdown and the beginning of the next deal. He may at no time reduce the number of chips he has in front of him, by cashing them in or by removing them from his stack, except when he leaves the game.

(c) A player who is tapped and calls remains in the pot until the showdown, drawing cards on even terms with the other players, without further contributions to the pot. If he has the best hand at the showdown, he takes the main pot. He has no interest in any side pots.

(d) A player who drops rather than call a bet in a side pot must discard his hand and relinquishes his interest in all pots.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

POKER PROBABILITIES

I said before that the higher mathematics of poker are not very important. It doesn't help a player much to know the chances of being dealt a straight flush or a full house or even a pair. Yet most of the published tables of poker probabilities are confined to that kind of information.

It *does* help to know the odds against improving any particular hand. A summary of these odds is given on page 94. *Memorize those odds.* At the very least they will tell you when the pot is offering you good odds on a speculative play.

In the following pages I give some special phases of poker mathematics.

Possible Poker Hands in a 52-Card Deck

Straight Flush	40
Four of a Kind.....	624
Full House.....	3,744
Flush	5,108
Straight.....	10,200
Three of a Kind.....	54,912
Two Pairs.....	123,552
One Pair.....	1,098,240
No Pair, less than above.....	1,302,540
Total	2,598,960

Possible Hands of Less Value Than One Pair

IF ACE COUNTS HIGH	IF ACE COUNTS LOW	
Ace High.....	King High.....	502,860
King High.....	Queen High	335,580
Queen High.....	Jack High	213,180
Jack High.....	Ten High	127,500
Ten High.....	Nine High	70,380
Nine High.....	Eight High	34,680
Eight High.....	Seven High	14,280
Seven High.....	Six High	4,080
Total.....		1,302,540

Chances of Being Dealt Poker Combinations in the Original Five Cards

Royal Flush.....	1 in 649,740
Straight Flush.....	1 in 64,974
Four of a Kind.....	1 in 4,165
Full House.....	1 in 694
Flush.....	1 in 509
Straight.....	1 in 255
Three of a Kind.....	1 in 47
Two Pairs.....	1 in 21
One Pair.....	1 in 2½
No Pair.....	1 in 2

Blind-Opening Draw Poker

Chance of beating one opponent who has not bet voluntarily (that is, chance of beating the blind raiser when you are the blind opener:)

If you draw 5 cards.....	9 to 1 against you
If you draw 4 cards to an ace.....	1½ to 1 against you
If you draw 3 cards to an A-K.....	Z to 1 against you
If you draw 2 cards to a flush.....	8 to 1 against you
If you draw 2 cards to a straight.....	8 to 1 against you
If you draw 2 cards to a straight flush.....	6 to 1 against you
If you draw 3 cards to a low pair (4, 3, 2).....	Even
If you draw 3 cards to a medium pair (5 to 9).....	11½ to 1 for you

On any better hand than a medium pair you should raise.

Comment: The pot usually offers 4 to 1. It will be seen that the usual plays stand to lose. However, the figures are complicated by the high cards in the hand that may pair—see page 58.

The same principles apply to straight draw poker (page 54) when you are next-to-last man and everyone but the dealer is out.

Every additional opponent reduces the odds in your favor on a particular hand. *But every additional opponent has to put his money into the pot, thus increasing the odds you are getting for your own money.* All poker calculations come to the same thing, though in varying degree: If you had the high hand to begin with, you figure to win. The more players there are against you, the fewer pots you will win but the more you will win each time you win the pot, and in the long run you still show a profit.

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

**Chances of Improving in the Draw
(Draw Poker)**

Draws to One Pair

Drawing three cards to one pair—odds against making:

Two pair or better.....	21½ to 1 against
Aces up or better.....	6 to 1 against
Three of a kind.....	8 to 1 against
Full house.....	97 to 1 against
Four of a kind.....	359 to 1 against

Drawing two cards to one pair and an ace kicker—odds against making:

Two pair or better.....	3 to 1 against
Aces up or better.....	4 to 1 against
Three of a kind.....	12 to 1 against
Full house.....	119 to 1 against
Four of a kind.....	1,080 to 1 against

Comment: It will be seen that if the player is sure he must have aces up or better to win, his chance is slightly better by holding the Ace kicker.

Draws to Three of a Kind

Drawing two cards to three of a kind—odds against making:

Full house or better.....	82/3 to 1 against
Full house	151/2 to 1 against
Four of a kind.....	15½ to 1 against

Drawing one card to three of a kind and any kicker—odds against making:

Full house or better.....	103/4 to 1 against
Full house	19¾ to 1 against
Four of a kind.....	46 to 1 against

Comment: Holding a kicker to three of a kind decreases the chance of improvement and obviously can be advisable only for deceptive or tactical purposes.

Other Odds

The odds are 38 to 9 or 4¼ to 1 against filling a fourflush; 39 to 8 or almost 5 to 1 against filling a double-ended straight; 43 to 4 or 10¾ to 1 against filling an inside or one-ended straight; 43 to 4 or 10¾ to 1 against filling a full house when drawing to two pair.

With a double-ended straight-flush draw (such as ♡ 8-7-6-5)

HOW TO PLAY WINNING POKER

the odds are 2 to 1 against making a straight or better, $22\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against making a straight flush, 5 to 1 against making a flush, $6\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against making a straight.

With a one-ended straight-flush draw (such as ♣ A-K-Q-J or ♠ 8-7-5-4), the odds are 3 to 1 against making a straight or better, 46 to 1 against making a straight flush, 5 to 1 against making a flush, 14 to 1 against making a straight.

Drawing four cards to an ace, the odds are $21\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against making a pair of aces or better. (In stud poker the odds are $31\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against pairing an ace if no other ace shows.) Drawing two cards to A-K, the odds are $21\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against making aces *or* kings, or better.

It is 23 to 1 against making a flush on a two-card draw and 22 to 1 against making a straight on a two-card draw (both ends open twice, as 10-9-8). It is 11 to 1 against making a straight or better on a two-card straight-flush draw such as ♠ 10-9-8.

Lowball

The following odds apply to lowball played with the bug. In each case it is assumed that the bug is *not* in the hand.

One card to 7-high.....	$31\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against
One card to 6-high.....	$51\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against
One card to 5-high.....	9 to 1 against
Two cards to any three cards under 7, to make 7-high or better.....	$271\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 against
One card to 8-high.....	2 to 1 against
One card to 9-high.....	Even

Comment: See page 61. The more players there are in the pot, the more low cards can be assumed to have been dealt originally and the worse the chances are for improvement. The same fact decreases the danger of pairing, but this does not alter the fact that the chances of improvement are lessened.



Watch this **FREE** 41 Minute Video
- "How To Win and Kick A** at
Texas Holdem Poker! [Go >>>](#)