

# Did Riess Get Lucky at the Final Table?

Statistics of the starting hands of the final table. Page 6 - Doug Hull



Exploit players by folding

Page 2 - Tri SLOWHABIT Nguyen



## FREEROLL POKER STRATEGY YOU CAN USE

THREEBARRELBLUFF.COM

ISSUE 2

### Three-bet & four-bet pre-flop wars. How they start, how they end

Poker is all about finding good spots for getting value, bluffing and rebluffing. These spots are found through pattern recognition. My book, **Poker Plays You Can Use**, shows you those patterns.

For instance, not many of you notice the huge number of green VW Beetles that are driving around. I did not either until something happened: I bought one. Now, I notice them all the time. I bet whatever car you drive you see all over too, but I miss it. We notice things when we recognize them.

Here is how this applies to poker. Yesterday at Mohegan Sun, there was a weak-tight fit-or-fold player to my immediate right. We will call him Victim. There is a TAG to my immediate left, we will call him Villain.

*First pattern:* Victim open limped into pots and then folded when he missed the flop. This was predictable. Predictable is exploitable. I noticed this pattern and used an exploit. Whenever the cards I held helped, I would isolation raise him. Sometimes for value, sometimes with a pretty lite speculative hand. I usually took it down on the flop.

*Second pattern:* Villain iso-raised just like I did. Villain to my left clearly noticed the first pattern also. Very often when I saw the first pattern but did not have the right kind of hand to exploit it, Villain would do the same exploit I had been considering. It is an all-you-can-eat buffet, I had no problem with him helping himself at my table.

*Third pattern:* Hero iso-raises Victim, Villain three-bets Hero. Now this is a pattern I do have a problem with. He noticed that I was often raising the limpers and since I acted first, I got to raise before he did. Clearly he had a problem with this because he started three-bet my iso-raise. It was almost as if he knew I was doing this lite! I let this aggression go the first time. And the second. And the third. Now that this behavior went from accident to coincidence to enemy action I had to stop him.

So how do I defeat pattern three: Raising my iso-raises.

*Defense one:* Hero stops iso-raising Victim so often. While that has merit, it is just going to let Villain pull the exploit in more situations and me in less. No way I am going to let Villain just eat my

lunch. I do slow down a little though.

*Defense two:* Catch a premium hand and call. I could hope to get a real hand and then call his lite three-bet and see a flop. Again, this has merit, but the cards need to help. Then I am out of position to a good player without the initiative. Even with a premium hand, this is not ideal.

*Defense three:* Catch a real hand and four-bet. I could hope to get a real hand and then re-raise him. He is likely lite, so he is mostly just going to fold though.

*Defense four:* Catch a speculative hand and four-bet him lite. Speculative hands like A7s, QJs, 88 are a lot more common than the AA, KK, AK hands. If I am going to four-bet him, most of the opportunities are going to be with something like this. The first time I stand up to him, he is likely to laydown anyways, so I might as well do it with a speculative hand.

I used defense four. Three times Villain had stolen from me while I was in the midst of a burglary myself. How rude.

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# You Just Got Owned, Sir!

What is the first thing you think of when you read that phrase?

If it was directed at me, I would feel a little embarrassed. My face gets a little hot. My stomach gets a little squirmy. In poker, I feel owned when someone outplays me. Getting outplayed means my opponent bluffed me with a worse hand and took down the pot. It is probably the main reason why I want to call river bets a lot. I don't want to fold the best hand and calling ensures that I was correct, even though I lost money confirming my read.

My fear of getting bluffed, or getting outplayed, was accidentally "cured" by a friend. I was grinding online and received an e-mail with the subject, "Owned Much?" I open the e-mail and as it was loading, I could feel my friend's enthusiasm and excitement because I couldn't wait to see how he owned his opponent. I was ready to see what type of monster bluff he had pulled because that's what owning someone means to me; you bluff them out of a pot. Since my friend is a great player and a sicko at times, I was thinking of all kind of crazy scenarios in my head. Did he three-bet bluff all-in on the turn with king high? Did he overbet shove the river with 5-high and won the pot without a showdown? Well, I got to the hand history and it was a little anti-climatic. It was a tiny pot. There was no bluffing involved. All the hand history showed was my friend losing the minimum with a very strong hand against the nuts. He was really proud of that fact that he saved a lot of money and indirectly, he owned his opponent.

This was a huge revelation for me because I didn't know you can own someone else by losing. And that's when I started folding more. In fact, it makes folding enjoyable because I know I owned my opponents since he has a strong hand and I can sense the frustration that they are feeling. I know they are frustrated because I can remember the frustrations I felt when I have the nuts and my

opponent kept folding and weren't paying me off. Then I realized that is another way to own your opponent. If he has a good hand and wants you to call, you outplayed him by folding. And since I love outplaying people, I keep folding against nits. Another form of owning people is to value-bet thin. There's no better feeling than value-betting with a marginal hand and getting snap-called by a worse hand. I'm not talking about tank-calling; that's everyday routine. I'm talking about the instant call you get once you placed your bet. Like he knew it was coming and was waiting to snap your head off. And since he called so fast, you thought you were toasted, only to find out a worse hand called and you still couldn't believe what just happened. I'm not sure if there is a better owning situation than getting snap-called by a worse hand. I live for those moments and it's when I'm most happiest at the poker table.

If your interpretation of being outplayed means something else, take solace in the fact that sometimes, no matter what you do, you aren't going to win the hand, especially if you are at a positional disadvantage. The sooner you accept this fact, the less annoyed you'll be. Nothing is going to change this idea, until you get the mighty button. Then you can outplay others and can smile and say to yourself that, "sir, you just got owned."



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(Three-bet wars continued from front page)

Well the fourth time, Hero had A7s and good reason to believe Villain would lay down most of his range. Villain had been three-betting me from \$25 to \$75. Three times Villain picked up my \$25. This time, I made it \$200 and Villain released his \$75. I considered us even at that point. He slowed down with the three-bet lite, and peace through superior fire-power was achieved.

I don't particularly like getting into these three-bet, four-bet wars. However, I am not some lamb to be sheared either.

Am I going to four-bet lite when the table nit three-bets me the first time? No way. What about the second, third or fourth? Probably not. It is completely feasible, but unusual, that he just woke up with a hand a few more times than is expected. His larger pattern of nittyness is the most important factor there. I am just the unlucky guy to be in a hand when he catches.

Occam's razor says the simplest explanation is probably right. When a TAG keeps raising me, he is probably exploiting me. When a nit keeps raising me, he probably has a hand.

-Doug Hull

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## Why Get Poker Coaching?

This is the question I asked myself several years ago when I was thinking of getting coached by Ed Miller. Am I really going to give this guy \$500 to sit in a Starbucks and talk about poker? My initial answer was, "No!"

Then my buddy says to me, "Doug, I have seen you make some seriously questionable calls for \$500 where you did not learn a damned thing." He was right; I gave it a shot. My book [Poker Plays You Can Use](#) documents the changes I made in my game after coaching with Ed and how I made them. I should have paid Ed \$1000.

Good coaches can see where your mistakes are, where your missed opportunities are, and why you are stalling out at your current thinking. We can see that because we have been there ourselves.

Your coaching bio here, hull@ThreeBarrelBluff.com for pricing.

# Ambition Meets Contentment at the Felt

*"Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life." - Proverbs 13:12, NIV*

Reading through Facebook the other day, I noted a few posts from a specific friend. His comments always seem to have a common theme; they are littered with complaints and discontentment.

Unmet expectations often bring a person to a place of discontent and make them feel pain. Apparently, my Facebook friend is expecting something from life, and life is not delivering. Are his expectations reasonable? I'm not sure I can answer that. However, I did start to think about how this relates to poker.

You don't have to spend much time at a poker table to observe deep discontentment in its participants.

"One frick'in time!" a player yells just as his flush draw fails to come in on the river.

Exposing his bluff, another player chides, "How do you call with that crap?!"

Apparently, these players are expecting something from the game and are seeing their desires go unfulfilled.

Dictionary.com defines contentment as being mentally or emotionally satisfied with things as they are.

Where is the place for contentment at the poker table? What should we expect as we sit down and post our blinds?

Many people have unrealistic expectations from poker. I believe this stems from a lack of understanding regarding the fundamentals of the game.

Imagine you're in the big blind and get dealt AA. Do you have expectations? Should you? What will your expectations do for you? Now, everyone folds to the small blind. You're holding your breath in anticipation. The small blind pauses for a second, then folds. The blinds are pushed your way. Are you disappointed? Should you be?

Let's go back a couple seconds to your pause with bated breath. This time the small blind puts in a raise. You reraise, and he pushes all his chips in the middle. You quickly call. Do you have expectations? Should you? What will your expectations do for you?

He flips over KK. What should you be expecting now?

The safe flop shows 38Q. The dealer lingers, burns a card, and the turn carts a King. Ouch. The river conveys no help, and you watch your stack get pushed his direction. "Nice hand," your opponent says. Are you disappointed? Your thoughts badger you..."I hate AA!"..."I never win with it!"

I'm sure you've experienced the turns of elation and despair while on the poker roller coaster. I believe these twists are jolting because we have unrealistic expectations from the game.

Let's go back to getting all-in preflop with our AA versus KK. About 80% of the time, AA will win that confrontation. However, this means KK will win 20% of the time.

Imagine you hand a die to your friend and say,

"See if you can roll a five." He rolls the die, and sure enough, it lands a five. How impressed would you be? Probably not impressed, period. You may not even tell anyone it happened. However, your friend rolling a five is less likely than KK beating AA. Does that perspective help change your expectations as you get all-in with AA and watch your opponent flip over KK?

These observations do not mean we slouch in our poker chair while sipping a margarita. There's room for intense ambition at the poker table.

Dictionary.com defines ambition as a strong desire for success, achievement, or distinction.

We need to separate what we can control and what we cannot control at the poker table. For those variables we cannot control, we need to be mentally or emotionally satisfied with things as they are. The strategic edge in poker is not found in what we cannot control; it's found in what we can control.

Regarding the controllable variables, the best players of the game have high expectations and are never content. They are not mentally or emotionally satisfied with things as they are. These players have a strong desire for success, achievement, and distinction. They're extremely ambitious.

What can you control in poker? The list is longer than most realize. Here are some examples.

- The size of the blinds in the game you play.
- The players against whom you choose to play.
- Your physical and mental state when you play.
- How much money you bring to the table.
- The seat you choose at the table.
- The cards you choose preflop.
- The betting decisions you make.
- The attention you give to the happenings at the table.
- How you handle yourself at the table.
- The amount of time and energy you spend away from the table learning and improving.

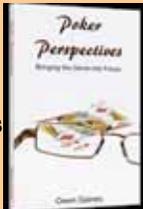
This list - and more - can be controlled by a player and allow ample room for a strategic edge over other poker players. These variables are the proper place for discontentment in poker.

When you are able to discern between what can be controlled and what cannot, you can properly adjust your expectations. When you change your expectations, you will experience less pain. When you experience less pain, you're more likely to enjoy the game and play your best.



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## Playing straddle poker

Many players that are newer to live games, or very active home games, may be thrown off by the simple question "do you straddle?" In poker, a straddle is a blind raise preflop (before the cards are even dealt) that essentially acts as a third blind in the pot. There are different kinds of straddles but the overall premise and approach is very similar. This article is going to explain how straddling works, whether or not you should do it, and how to adjust in games with an active straddle.



There are 3 major kinds of straddles:

**UTG Straddle:** This is the classic straddle where the UTG player puts out double the big blind BEFORE getting dealt cards. UTG then acts last preflop.

**Mississippi Straddle:** This straddle gives the button the opportunity to straddle first (for 2x the big blind), and if he defers the option rotates counter-clockwise. Again, all done BEFORE getting dealt cards.

**Un-capped Straddle:** This removes the "double the big blind" limit on the straddle size.

Not all poker rooms allow straddling, so it's best to check with the floor to ensure it's acceptable. And most online rooms don't offer the option to straddle, so this is really more of a live poker phenomena. In Vegas many rooms allow UTG straddles and Mississippi's are allowed in certain rooms...though it's pretty rare to see un-capped straddles for \$1/\$2 and \$2/\$5 games. Knowing what a straddle is helps, but how do you answer the question:

### "Should I Straddle This Pot?"

First let's understand the mechanics of what this blind raise does. If we look at a normal \$2/\$5 game, the blinds are \$2 and \$5 and say the average stack at the table is \$500. This means the effective stacks in each hand are 100bb. This is pretty common-place and an effective stack range that most online players are familiar with. But how does a straddle influence things? Well if we take the same \$2/\$5 table and put an UTG \$10 straddle into the mix, the effective BB is now \$10, making each \$500 stack essentially 50bb to start the hand. By adding a straddle the effective stack sizes have dropped in half before the cards are even dealt!

This can be a beautiful thing if you are a great midstack poker player, or if the average stack size were \$1,000 (200bb) and you want to straddle and

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# Poker's 1% First look at Ed Miller's new book

## Don't Play No-Limit Hold'em Like It's A Slot Machine

This is a slot machine.



You put your money in, press a button, and it deals you a hand. You choose cards to discard, hit another button, and it deals you replacement cards. Then it checks what hand you made and pays you accordingly. Six coins for a flush. Four for a straight. Nine for a full house. Make quads, and you get twenty-five coins. [Apologies to my friend Bob Dancer for calling a video poker machine a “slot.” Bob has carved out a career for himself playing video poker professionally. He’s also created a lot of video poker educational materials, and he teaches classes on the game. If video poker interests you, look him up.]

The payouts are fixed. Make the hand, get paid. That’s how it works.

The vast majority of no-limit hold’em players play poker like they’re playing a slot machine. They’re trying to make big hands. That’s foremost in their thought process. Let’s flop a set. Let’s make a flush. Low straights are sneaky. Let’s try to make one of those.

Sometimes when I take on new students, I sit and watch them play for a while. They’ll toss a few chips in with a hand like Kd6d. I’ll ask them why. “What’s your plan for that hand?”

Invariably, the answer involves flop, turn, and river cards that, when combined with a king and

six of diamonds, make a rare and very strong poker hand.

It’s nearly universal. Almost everyone who isn’t already a stone cold professional player thinks this way. I’ll get in cheap and see if I can flop something. Let’s make a big hand this time. Stacking people sure is fun. Implied odds, implied odds, implied odds.

Unfortunately, there’s a problem. A big problem.

Poker is not a slot machine. If you make a flush, you don’t get paid six coins. Sometimes you stack someone. But much more often, you get almost nothing for it. And every once in a while, you’ll run into an even better hand, and you’ll be the one getting stacked.

Take these hands, for instance.

Some people limp in, and you limp with 7c4c. The blinds call and check. The flop comes 6-5-3 rainbow. Bingo!

Everyone checks, you bet half the pot, and everyone folds.

Someone raises preflop, and you call with 3-3. The big blind calls. The flop comes 9-4-3 with a flush draw. The big blind checks, and the preflop raiser checks. You bet half pot, and both players fold.

Someone raises preflop. A player calls, and you call with 8h6h. The big blind calls. The flop comes Ah9h2h. Everyone checks to you. You bet half pot, and everyone folds.

Be honest. How many times have you played hands like these? You hit gin on the flop, and you don’t even begin to sniff someone else’s stack. I’ve played these hands a zillion times. It happens all the time.

How about this one. It’s a \$2-\$5 game with \$1,000 stacks. A player opens to \$20. Another player calls, and you call with 8h6h. The big blind calls. There’s \$82 in the pot with \$980 behind.

The flop comes Ah9h2h. Everyone checks to you. You bet \$50. The big blind calls, and the other two players fold. There’s \$182 in the pot with \$930 behind.

The turn is the 3c. The big blind checks. You bet \$150, and he check-raises to \$420. You call. There’s \$1,022 in the pot with \$510 behind.

The river is the 4d. He shoves for \$510.

How do you like your small flush?

You hate it, right? This is the cue for you to take your sunglasses off and say, “This is soooo sick,” between seven and nine times. Then someone calls clock on you, and you wait it out for 55 seconds, fidgeting nervously with your chips and sunglasses. Finally you end up folding, because ultimately you know as well as everyone else that the guy has the king-high flush.

On a slot machine, you try to make a flush because if you make one you will get paid six coins. In no-limit hold’em, very frequently making a flush doesn’t pay squat.

### The Flipside

On the other hand, sometimes making a flush is hugely valuable. Consider this hand. It’s \$2-\$5 game with \$1,000 stacks. You open to \$15 from one off the button with Ac4c. The small blind reraises to \$55. The big blind folds, and you call. There’s \$115 in the pot, and you have \$945 behind.

The flop is 8h5c3s. The small blind bets \$70. You min-raise to \$140, and he calls. There’s \$395 in the pot, and you have \$805 behind.

The turn is the Tc. The small blind checks, and you bet \$270. The small blind calls. There’s \$935 in the pot, and you have \$535 behind.

The river is the Qc.

You made a flush. I guarantee that the moment you see that river card, you will be mentally fist-pumping as hard as you ever do at a poker table.

This is a flush that matters.

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## To read their hands, watch their arms

In the realm of science, there are some cold, concrete facts. As examples, the values of opening hands are known and the calculation of outs and odds are mathematically-based and easily calculable. Books can easily teach new players such information, and attempting to play poker without this basic knowledge is a recipe for disaster.

Advanced players mostly grapple with the “art” of poker. For example, we think deeply about how differently-sized bets may be perceived (ironically, post-oak bluffs may be scarier to an opponent than a pot-sized bet), whether recent events may have caused an opponent to be on tilt or tight, and how opponents’ behaviors may indicate strength or weakness. The “art” of poker is mostly learned

by logging hour after hour around the poker felt: That is, we learn from our experiences (not from books). These experiences have two major problems, however. First, good learning experiences may be encountered rarely, and hence learning can be very slow. Second, they are subjective experiences, and we may question whether what we are learning is actually correct.

Is there any way to learn the art of poker more quickly, and with greater certainty? Are there any objective data about the art of poker? The answer to both questions is: You bet! To uncover such information, however, you need to know about those scientific studies that shed light on poker. In my recent book (*Emotion-Based Poker*), for

example, I describe what scientific research says about how and why people become risk-averse or risk-prone.

Today, and in future columns, I hope to describe recently-published scientific research that could help improve our poker playing skills. Today’s research article (Slepian, Young, Rutchik, & Ambady, in press) addresses some age-old questions: How can an opponent’s face and behavior be used to predict the strength of his hand, and is there a particular part of the body to which we should attend? Dr. Slepian and colleagues conducted three different studies. In Study 1, they showed 78 undergraduates 20 short videos of a

*(Continued on page 6)*

(Slot Machine continued from facing page)

What's the difference between this hand and the other hands? In this hand, making a flush and winning a huge pot was Plan D. Plan A was to win the pot preflop with a blind steal. When that didn't work, Plan B was to win the pot on this favorable flop. [If it's not obvious why this flop is "favorable", keep reading. This stuff is what the book is about.] When that didn't work, Plan C was to win the pot on the turn with a fairly massive bet. When that didn't work, it became fairly clear that the small blind held a big overpair.

It was time for Plan D. Suck out.

If you're like most no-limit players, you rarely (if ever) play hands like the above. Maybe you fold preflop. Maybe you just call on the flop rather than raise. (Maybe you even fold the flop.) Maybe you raise the flop, but you check it back after you get called when you turn the flush draw.

If you don't play hands like the above, then you're doing it all wrong.

Flushes are rare hands. A slot machine pays you a fixed six coin payout every time you make one. It's a payout that's finely tuned to compensate you (almost) fairly for the hand's rarity.

There's no finely tuned fixed payout in poker. Fishing for flushes on the flop and turn will leave you disappointed. Too often you will end up winning very little for your big hand. The rest of the time, when you miss your hand, you'll be folding and folding, bleeding money slowly away.

And if you make a small flush and play a massive pot, there's a good chance you'll be losing it.

Flushes are much more useful when the pot already happens to be massive when you make one.

### The Other Problem

Here's the other problem. You're playing to try to make big hands and stack people. Simple enough.

That guy on your left, guess what his plan is. If you guessed that he's trying to make big hands

and stack people, you're correct. How about that older gentleman in the Yankee's hat across the table? Yup, trying to make a big hand and stack someone. How about that woman with the headphones on trying to ignore the unhygienic fellow to her right? She's trying to make a big hand and stack someone.

Once upon a time, you could sit, wait for big hands, and count on some bumbling fool with no kicker to hand you a stack for it. Those days are well gone. When I sit in a randomly-selected \$2-\$5 game in Las Vegas these days, I'd guess at least seven out of my nine opponents all have the same gameplan. They want to make big hands and stack people while refusing to pay off other players' big hands.

If everyone else plays with your same strategy, who wins? Not you.

### The Bottom Line

As long as you build your strategy around trying to make big hands, you will never be good enough to move up and match wits with the professionals. You will lose to them. Until you abandon the entire thought process and rebuild from scratch, you will never beat them.

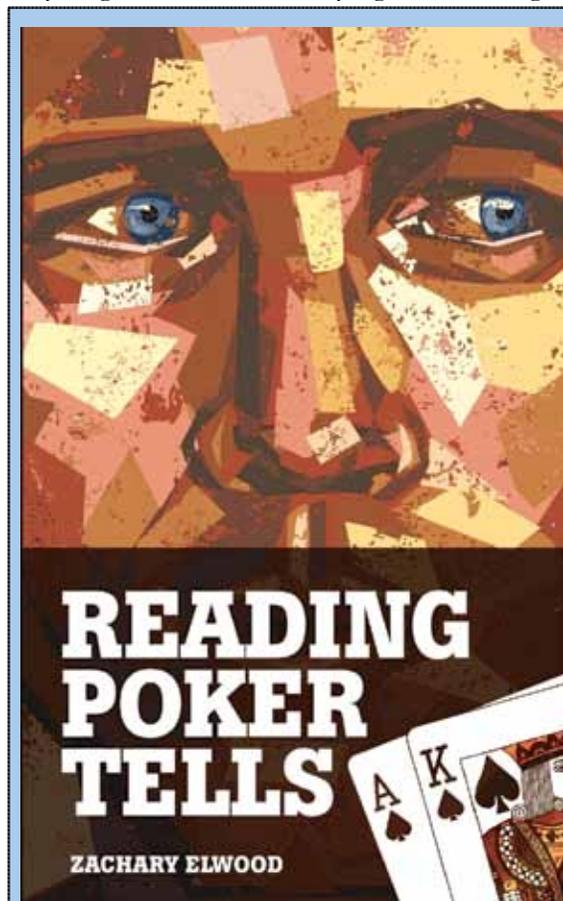
Poker is not a slot machine. Stop playing it like one.

*This article is an excerpt from Ed's forthcoming Poker's 1%. Pre-order it from [NotedPokerAuthority.com](http://NotedPokerAuthority.com)*



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“Elwood's Reading Poker Tells is clearly the best book on this aspect of live play.”

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-“Limon”  
professional poker player

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(Straddle continued from page 3)

get the game back to effective 100bb play. But most players don't actively practice 50bb play and not all players are bankroll prepared to effectively jump up to \$5/\$10 (what a straddle at \$2/\$5 essentially does). Another thing to consider is that when you straddle UTG you are putting in more money from one of the worst positions at the table. And because a straddle is done BEFORE the cards are dealt there is a huge chance that you will be dealt total junk.



So as a pure default I wouldn't suggest straddling the pot. Why put in extra money, halve the effective stacks, and all from the worst non-blind position at the table? That being said, and like everything in poker, there are select situations where straddling could be best:

### “When Is Straddling Best?”

1. **When it's socially acceptable:** There are some live tables where straddling is the norm and it's drilled into the game. Rather than defer your option to straddle and make everyone hate you, why not just straddle as well and sacrifice the bit of EV for keeping the table jovial and gambly? If the table ever offers up the option to do a round of straddles I always accept it. It gets people in the right mood and also keeps them there. Now I can hear my mom in my ear saying “James, if all of your friends were jumping off a bridge would you jump too?”...well I wouldn't jump off a bridge but if everyone were straddling I would happily straddle as well!

2. **When you can go for straddle/bang often:** The added benefit of straddling is that you act last preflop. You straddle, things happen, and then it's your option if the pot hasn't been opened. If it's the kind of game where you straddle, a bunch of players call the straddle and then you can raise them when it comes back to you...it can be a great spot. If you take a \$2/\$5 example where you straddle for \$10 and 4 people call, that means there is ~\$55 in the middle that you can try and attack with a nice big raise. This isn't a super common dynamic because most players loosen up their standards more in straddle pots and thus won't fold as much...but there are select games where this can be a super profitable setup.

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(Watch their Arms continued from page 4)

poker player making a bet (all videos were from the 2009 WSOP). Approximately one-third of the students saw the entire players' bodies (from the table up), one-third saw just the players' faces, and one-third saw just the players' arms. The students were asked to judge the quality of the players' hands, from 1 (very bad) to 7 (very good). Importantly, the objective quality of the players' hands was known and the number of chips wagered was not associated with hand strength. What were the findings? In the "arms-only" group, people were significantly better than chance at predicting the strength of the player's hands. Conversely, people in the "face-only" group were marginally worse than chance, suggesting that sophisticated players use their faces as deception. Study 2 essentially replicated the findings of Study 1, this time using 22 different videos from the 2009 WSOP.

Study 3 sought to more specifically determine how arm movements may betray a player's confidence. Because prior research has found that anxiety decreases the smoothness of one's motor movements (Beuter & Duda, 1985), the researchers had 40 participants watch the same 22 clips from Study 2 and rate either a) the smoothness of the players' arm movements or b) the confidence of the player making the hand movements. It turns out that both ratings – smoothness and confidence – predicted the objective value of the players' hands.

Three major conclusions can be drawn from this research. First, watching our opponents' arm movements appears to be a valid indicator of hand strength, with smoother, more confident movements predicting better hands. Second, facial expressions may be used as an inverse indicator of hand strength (weak is strong, strong is weak). Last, and most importantly, science can teach us about the art of poker!

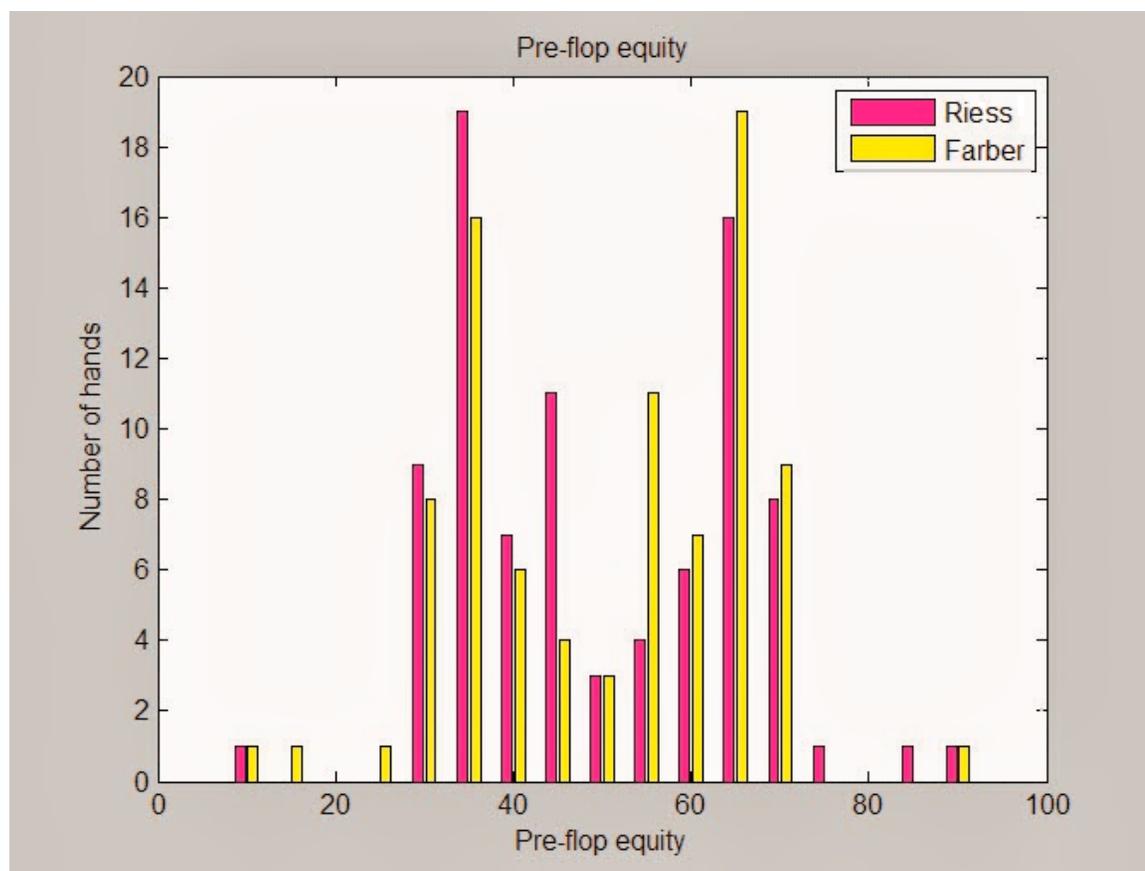
References:

Beuter, A., & Duda, J. L. (1985). Sport psychology analysis of the arousal/motor performance relationship in children using movement kinematics. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 7, 229-243.

Slepian, M. L., Young, S. G., Rutchik, A. M., & Ambady, N. (in press). Quality of professional poker players' poker hands is perceived accurately from arm motions. *Psychological Science*.

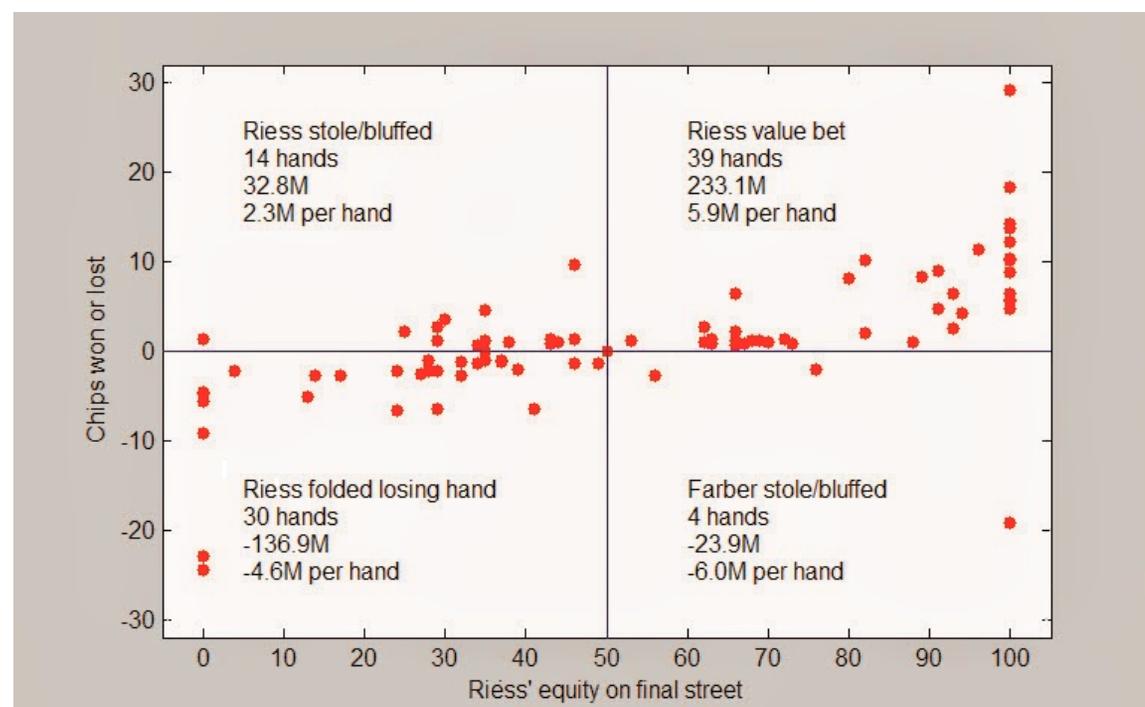
## Did Riess get lucky at the WSOP Final Table 2013

I do data analysis for my day job. I was very curious if Riess really did get lucky at the final table. Now, pre-flop all-in equity of two hands is not a perfect measure of the value of a hand in a heads-up match, but it is something we can work with. Let us look at the pre-flop equity of each match-up of hands:



Not thinking about the playability of the hands, Farber actually has a negligible advantage in the starting hands.

What about the board run out? The following graphic shows the equity for Riess on the final street of play, and the win or loss he got that hand.



So looking at this chart, in the upper right corner are the hands where Riess won at showdown or made the final bet with greater than 50% equity. He had 39 hands in this category, where Farber only had 30 hands where he did the equivalent. The average size of these hands was 5.9M for Riess but only 4.6M for Farber. Hands that are on the far extreme to the right made it to the river at 100% equity for Riess.

What about steals and bluffs? Riess bet with the worst hand and won 14 hands. One of these was at the River where he had 0% equity and won a small pot. His average was 2.3M on these hands. Farber had far less hands where he was able to push Riess out of his hand. Notice though he pushed

Riess out of one big pot with his famous bluff. Farber actually did much better per hand on successful steals because of this bluff. Overall, the stealing back and forth these two did changed very little to help Riess directly since he only stole slightly more than he was stolen from.

(Continued on page 8)



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- PhD Psychology from Virginia Tech

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- Over 50 peer reviewed journal articles
- Winning amateur player



# Psychological Principles of Poker Success

Since I was introduced to no limit hold'em a few years ago, I've been obsessed with figuring out how to take my game to the next level. In that vein, I decided to study a group of top tournament players (many of whom are also cash game players) to find out it takes to get to the top and stay there. Specifically, I wanted to know what psychological tips, tricks, and strategies elite players use. As we all know, once you get to a certain level, everyone knows the fundamentals of the game and psychological aspects become increasingly important.

I analyzed my data and concluded that there are nine overall psychological principles that players can use to enhance their mental game and increase profitability. They are:

- Develop Talent and Expertise
- Set Goals
- Maintain Self-Control
- Be Motivated
- Have Focus and Concentration
- Be Self-Confident
- Master Tilt
- Be Mentally Tough
- Learn to Have Resilience and Joy

While the principles seem straight forward, it takes constant work and attention to these skills in order to achieve and maintain elite status. You have no control over how opponents play. Variance and tilt are constant psychological challenges. These things can derail you if you let them. The one thing you have control over is how you choose to use your mind. While we aren't born knowing how to control our minds, with work and effort almost anyone can become a mental game master.

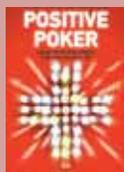
I've concluded that there are three prerequisites associated with mastering the above principles of psychological success. They are: passion, a willingness to learn, change and grow, and an open mind. Passion allows you to persist at mastering both poker and psychological challenges. A willingness to learn, change and grow makes changing habits easier, and open mindedness increases the likelihood that you'll seek out and implement new information and techniques. I call the combination of these three traits the success trifecta and if you have them (or work to develop them), you'll have a head start on working towards the nine principles of psychological success!



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- Four World Series of Poker cashes



(Straddle continued from page 5)

**3. On the button with good players in the blinds:** When you straddle on the button you force the blinds to act first. By making this button straddle I force them to act first which will almost certainly induce a ton of folds at a full table. This essentially takes them out of the hand and of course puts us on the button giving us postflop position if we go there. Still consider the rest of the table and also the fact that button straddling isn't always the most common allowance in casino poker rooms.

### “How To Play When It's Straddled?”

Even if we aren't actively straddling at a table we'll still have to deal with pots where another player did, and having at least a basic game plan is great. Since we know that straddling cuts the effective stacks in half (or lower if the straddle is uncapped) we need to adjust accordingly. This means our preflop decisions become super important as won't have very deep SPRs postflop which makes playing drawing hands too tough. This is where having a short-mid stack strategy is particularly useful and understanding how to leverage your stack size when being aggressive preflop. It would take an entire book to write good strategy on this subject, but here are some quick pointers that can help:

**1. Small pairs & suited connectors:** Wave goodbye to these hands! Given the smaller stack sizes (especially in games where players started with 100bb and now have 50bb effective with the straddle on) it becomes too tough to play these hands. We aren't getting a good price on our stack and calling raises is pretty much out of the question when you consider the 25x rule. If the straddle didn't totally nuke the effective stacks under 50bb then just play normal poker with these hand types.

**2. Stop calling raises:** With effective stacks of 50bb or lower it's usually not profitable to call preflop raises. These preflop raises represent too much of our starting stack and calling just puts us in a -EV situation. Even in multi-way pots you are trading multiple sources of implied odds for an even smaller SPR pot and it will be -EV most of the time. Rather than call consider using your

stack leverage and three betting and pressuring your opponents rather than constantly calling and praying that you smash the flop. And remember, folding is totally acceptable!



**3. Know thy straddler:** Understand who the straddler is and how they are likely to react if you open-raise, if you open-limp, or if you limp behind. For instance, there are some straddlers that will always protect their straddle and will call tons of preflop raises. There are others that will raise anytime it's limped to their straddle. And of course many that will just treat it like any normal pot. Look for situations where you can limp in with big hands to induce sizable raises by the straddler. These spots may not be super common but they are a nice adjustment that will allow you to exploit an aggro-tard with ease. In games where the entire table isn't straddling constantly I tend to assume a one-off straddle is done by more of a gambler and thus will take lines that exploit them accordingly.

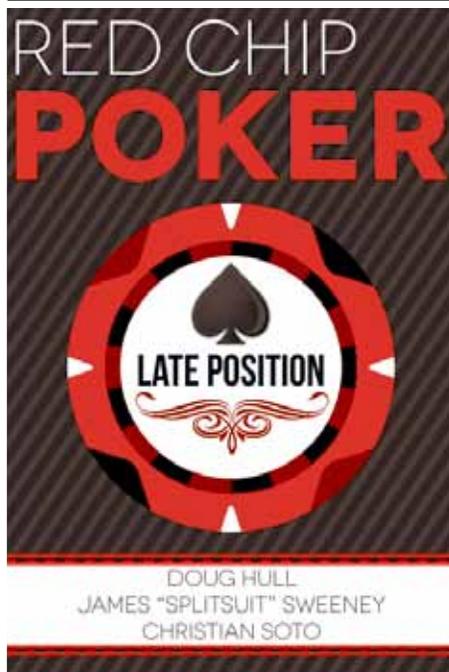
Overall, I don't suggest straddling in most situations. It's generally a -EV play that will do nothing but burn money and increase the cost of each orbit. There are select situations, usually when the straddle retains a gambler's environment, where it's OK, but don't make it your standard. When facing straddlers remember that the effective stacks are halved and thus you are usually a bit more card-dependent. Pick your spots, know how the straddler is likely to react, and adjust accordingly. Straddles can be a lot of fun, especially in home games, just make sure you fully understand the play and the appropriate ways to choose +EV lines!



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# Focus on winning

Competitive poker is such a mentally draining strategic battle; it's easy to lose sight of your primary objective. In your quest to outplay your opponents, secondary goals often overtake your attention. Winning no longer matters; instead you seek morale victories and justifications for losing. It is crucial for those who care about winning to avoid sabotaging their results. If you play to win, don't forget the winning part! Avoid focusing on:

- Proving your worthiness
- The worthiness of your opponent
- What others might think of a specific play you are about to make
- How others would play your current hand
- How unlucky you are about to get
- What excuses you will make for losing if you bust out in the current hand

Many things happen at the poker table that sidetracks your focus. Opponents distract you with trash talk, downswings promote self-doubt and bad beats ignite tilt. Here are a few pointers to help you through those times when you feel your focus slipping.

- Tighten up your play: Keeping things tight and simple should help reduce the severe blunders that can result from lack of focus. Keep this in mind while you work on bringing your focus back to winning.

- Tune out your opponents: Ignore the table chatter while you try to get yourself back on track.

- Walk away for a minute: When you feel like your focus is straying; take a break. Sometimes it's best to get blinded out for an orbit or two versus playing through your funk.

- Relax: Pressure can cause even the best players to tilt. Remind yourself that you cannot control the cards. Empower yourself by focusing solely on what you can control and ignore everything else.

It is naive to think that you can maximize your win rate while focusing on anything else but playing your "A game". Take inventory of your focus during your poker session. When you notice signs of your focus wandering towards anything else than playing your best, make sure to simplify things, ignore needless distraction and walk away from the table for a while. Not only will this help you maximize your wins, it will also help you enjoy your time at the poker table that much more.



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- First book in progress



*(Riess Lucky? continued from page 6)*

What Riess' stealing did however was prevent those hands from moving into Farber's value area in the lower left hand corner. With his steady aggression, he was able to take hands that could have been in Farber's value corner and prevent them from ever being played out.

Look at how many hands Farber held the higher equity hand on the final street. He held it more often by one hand.

What do we take from this in cash games? Well placed aggression wins. That continuation bet on the flop when you have two overs and fold out a small pocket pair are wins. You had the lower equity yet won. Pushing opponents out of their middle strength hands will deny them lots of pots.

No attempt is made in this analysis to understand how playable the hands were. For instance holding a pocket pair of Fives might put you ahead in equity, but it is near impossible to play them for value on many boards.



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