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Texas holdem is by far the easiest and the best poker game for any beginner to learn. A texas holdem strategy can be learned in a matter of minutes but understanding and obtaining a solid texas holdem strategy that would help you win on a consistent basis will take time. I would suggest playing online, which offers a variety of play money tables for players to practice on, until you're ready to move up to the real money tables. But before I get into the basic strategies of how to play a solid poker game, there are a few factors in poker everyone should take into consideration.

Affordability - Simply, if you can't afford to lose at poker, then don't play at all. My solution for those with a hole in their pocket is to practice their texas holdem strategy online with playmoney. Playing for playmoney may be different from playing with real money because most players don't care if they lose their playmoney and tend to go all in with no hand at all. Playmoney will teach you the fundamentals of holdem and you'll learn how to play a tight-solid game, especially when dealing with those all-in playmoney maniacs.

No limit texas holdem is a psychological warfare. If you are not mentally prepared before sitting at a real money table, then you shouldn't play at all. WITHOUT mental preparation at a holdem game, you're pretty much throwing your money away. Mental preparation isn't placing yourself in a trance or a Zen-like state (Unless it does help, then by all means). Mental preparation is focusing on winning, having a positive attitude, and possessing the attributes all winning poker players have:

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**Discipline
Patience
A Plan**

Discipline and Patience are two attributes one must learn on their own. The Super Strategy Guide will help you develop a Plan to play successful poker, specifically, texas holdem. Without these attributes, poker players will take advantage of you and in poker terms, you will be considered as a "fish" in the game of texas holdem.

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Texas Holdem Image and Poker Personality

Your texas holdem image is represented by your personality. Every poker player has a personality that can make or break them at a poker game. Your texas holdem image is a crucial part of playing texas holdem. Before I started writing this the section of identifying your holdem image and your opponents, I read an article that I've found really interesting that relates to this topic of table image.

A book author and professional holdem player was playing texas holdem at the Mirage in Las Vegas. A player left his table and a man wearing shorts and a Hawaiian shirt filled the seat. The poker author explains, "I immediately pegged this guy for another tourist. After the tourist sat down, he was telling stories and joking with the dealer and some of the other players. He didn't seem to have a care in the world as he sat there talking and playing." Everyone at the table perceived this character's texas holdem image as a weak opponent, but this care-free tourist was winning with his very tight and aggressive style of play.

As the poker author left the table and went to the cashier to cash out, he bumped into his Hawaiian shirt, dressed friend and introduced himself. He explains, "I asked him where he was from and to my surprise he said he lived in Las Vegas. I mentioned that he looked like a tourist. 'I know,' he said. 'Why would I want anyone at the table to think I'm a local?'"

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Below are 5 texas holdem image descriptions that you may generally find at a poker table: A fish, weak-tight players, the maniac, the rock, and strong-aggressive players. Try to find a texas holdem image description that conveys your style of play or opponents you've played with. But remember, just like the article, your opponents may use their table image to throw you off to make you believe they are something that they are not.

A Fish: The weakest texas holdem image and player there is. Also the most prevalent, fishes have poor hand selections and will call just about anything (also known as calling stations). This person has very little skill or discipline, investing into too many hands, hoping for a lucky break. Chips are earned mainly from these players. However, fish players enjoy the bluffing element of poker, so don't be surprised if a fish tries to make a move with nothing or slow-playing by checking the best hand.

Basically, a fish is just a bad player. You can't bluff a bad player. When a fish has some kind of hand and is still in the pot, it's obvious he's got something. Play straight forward - no tricks or fancy plays against these players.

Weak-Tight: These players understand the fundamentals of winning at poker and have better hand selection, but with one exception - they're afraid. They are quite passive and will often check or call rather than bet or raise. They fear losing a pot with an average hand and get bullied around with raises. This texas holdem image may seem easy to bully around, but are capable of trapping you later on.

It's better to lead with a bet if you're acting before the weak-tight opponent rather than check.

When you bet into a weak-tight player, their common reaction would be just calling or folding. If they fold, great, if they call, they're probably holding a decent hand, but are afraid to bet or raise at the pot because they're skeptical they might lose the pot. So making a strong play at the Turn would scare them away.

Maniac: Also known as a loose aggressive holdem player, these players play as many hands as fishes but are inclined to raise and reraise. It's quite difficult to tell if they are bluffing or not. They are known to bully players around, but isolating these players by reraising them off guard or having a decent hand will scare them away. Play tight against these opponents and trap these players to knock them out.

Play strong hands against these opponents (AK, AQ, KK, etc) or play a hand if you can see the flop for cheap, and if you hit a good hand on the flop, lead off with a bet. The maniac may try to play back and raise, but if you have a considerable hand, then don't be shy to reraise to make them second think their move.

The Rock: Super tight holdem player who only plays premium hands. They play so few hands, that when they do limp in or call a bet, you'll know exactly what they have (AA, AJ, KK, etc). Also known as the predictable player. So when a rock raises or calls your bet, you should have alarms flashing in your head that your up against a premium hand.

It's best to stay out of the way when these players raise preflop. But knowing these players only hold big hands preflop, flops with no aces or face cards can be most profitable for you, knowing your rock opponent didn't hit, unless they hold high pockets.

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Try to bet a substantial amount to take the pot down.

Strong-Aggressive: These holdem players are at the top of the pyramid: Strategic and tactically sound players with the ability to adapt and change gears in every game. They have control over the tables and are much more eager to bet at the pot rather than call. They change pace at anytime, making them very unpredictable and feared by their opponents.

Table Observation

Most individuals have no beginning preflop texas holdem strategy; they would sit at a poker table trying to play quickly as possible without being aware of their surroundings and whom they're playing with. This is a common mistake most poker players make. Before jumping into the action and start betting like maniac with your pockets, consider the following preflop strategy...

Number of Players: Is your table a full or short handed (Six players or less) game? With a full table of nine or ten players, it's likely someone's holding a strong hand or overcards (AA, KK, AK, AQ, etc) that can easily beat your hand. Also, the chances of someone else's hole cards fitting the flop will be much better. You should take this into consideration, and play your hand as cautious as possible. But before getting into the action consider the next important point...

Type of Opponents: As explained in Lesson Two of identifying your opponents, the most crucial information you can obtain is how your opponents play and adjust to their style of play. Usually, I would sit at a table and not play for the first five minutes; I let the button and blinds pass me once before I start jumping in, unless I pick up a nice hand like AA, KK, AQ, etc. After identifying who are weak and strong opponents, I then start picking up pots off the weak players. But before I

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start hammering with bets and take those pots, I like to consider the next important point...

Your position: Position is very important, as I will elaborate in lesson four. Players in late position or last to act (preferably on the dealer button) have a great advantage than those acting ahead. Players acting last can observe the action taking place before them and also have the ability to influence the size of the pot. At times, your position may be more valuable than the cards you hold.

Stack Size: A player with a large stack dominates his opponents and can scare or drive opponents out of the pot and fold, giving them the fear of being eliminated. On the other hand, watch out for players with short stacks. If they are still in a pot, they're usually all in at some point or another.

The First Five Minutes

First things first, determine exactly what everyone's trying to accomplish. Is the individual there to learn, have fun or play for a living? Most of your profit in no limit holdem games is going to come from picking a target and going after him. A lesson taken from the movie Rounders: "If you can't spot the sucker within the first half hour, then you are sucker."

Figure out who is winning and who is losing. People usually don't play as well when they are losing, therefore a losing player may be an easier target. In no limit, you have to learn and understand people you play against. The strategy you used yesterday could be worthless today. You need to know what kind of game plan you are going to use and know the game plan you will be using will be the right one.

Another individual you should target are player's who are excessively drinking. Pick on the drunk guy who's just there to have a good time and gamble. You may get a few bad beats from time to time with drunks because of there willingness to take chances more often, but in the long run they'll pay you off nicely.

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In the first five minutes, try to establish a dominating presence at the table. You don't want to be someone else's mark. If no one at the table knows you, they might mark you as a fish and try to bully you around. No limit's no fun when you have people targeting you. Reek of confidence; sit up straight and let them know how comfortable you are. Be intimidating - let them know you're a well-rounded no limit holdem player and you're ready for any play they throw at you.

Last, but not least important point, is to pay attention. If you pay attention constantly after you fold, you will pick up on certain tells and player's betting patterns. Players will show information you can use against them.

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The Importance of Poker Position

Texas Holdem is all about people and position. All rounded holdem players agree that position in no limit texas holdem is fundamentally important. Playing your hole cards in late position can be much more profitable than in early poker position. The reason because much more information is gathered before acting. For example, I was playing a \$1-\$2 no limit cash game at a local spot. I limped in with 2♥, 9♣ unsuited (a terrible hand) on the dealer button, just to see some action. Flop came down A♠-A♥-4♣. A player in early position made a \$15 bet. Two players fold and it was my turn to act. I should have folded, but his play seemed a bit off. I identified this player as a weak-tight player earlier, and typically if he had the best hand he would just check. I thought, 'if he held trips, why would he raise so early instead of checking and try to trap other players.' I didn't put him on an Ace this time, so I called. The turn came down with a 7♥, making it A♠-A♥-4♣-7♥. My opponent made another bet of \$20. I hesitated a bit, but made a split decision to reraise another \$30 on top of his \$20. He folds and I take the pot down.

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Playing late position gives you an idea where you stand by observing how players react and bet. On the other hand, players at early position may use their poker position to check-raise the late positioned aggressors and trap them later at the end. In Texas Holdem, both ends, late and early should be played cautiously regardless.

How to Bet

A bet is a declaration that you have a good hand. When a player raises, they are proclaiming they have the best hand and they'll wager money on it. Typically, players are supposed to raise when they have a good hand and those who have a bad hand are suppose to fold. If everyone stuck to this policy, there would be no need for any strategy. However, most players play contrary to this idea and attempt to be cunning and deceptive. The following descriptions are strategic plays:

Blind-Stealing: When you are on the dealer button and only you have the blinds are left, a raise is often called blind-stealing. This may cause the blinds to fold, stead of simply checking. This strategy will never make you rich, but ends the game fast so you may be dealt a new hand (and adds a few chips to your stack).

Blind stealing is a tremendous tactic within a tournament game, especially when the blinds become very high.

Steal-Raise: If you are the last to act and all players have checked to you, a simple raise can limit the number of active players or take the pot. This move is only recommended if you've hit a piece of the flop and want to see where you stand.

Check-Raising: The act of checking to your opponent with the intention of luring them to raise, so that you can reraise them back. Your intention is to lure them to feel secure about their hand and betting so you can reraise back at them. For example, I was in early position and was holding AQ and the flop came down as Q-A-A. I didn't want to scare anyone out of the pot so I checked and waited for someone to bet. My opponent bets, and I raise him back with a substantial amount that kept him thinking for a minute.

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The Opener: Raising when you're first to act. This strategy is used to limit the number of players and is an information bet (usually players with strong hands will call). Many will fold, but the ones remaining will either be equally aggressive or truly have a good hand.

Squeezing: Raising when suspecting another player or players may be on a draw (players looking for a straight, flush, etc). Raising discourages players taking a chance on their draws. For example, I was holding a suited hand J10, and the flop came down as 2-A-8 with two clubs on the community. One more club would have gave me a strong flush possibility, but my opponent bet a strong amount that wasn't worth gambling if I didn't hit my flush.

Bluffing 101

Bluffing is used to deceive other player's into thinking you have a better hand when you really don't. In order to make the bluff work, you need the other players to think you actually have a better hand by betting or raising.

Bluffing should be done at the right time and done sparingly. Remember, everyone is looking for their own opportunity to bluff. Here are some reason why you shouldn't bluff.

When Not to Bluff

Player's Expect You to Bluff: You were caught bluffing and now labeled as a poor bluffer. Don't stick you hand in the cookie jar until you rebuild your reputation as an honest player, then try to bluff later.

Against Too Many Players: The chances are that someone has a made hand and they'll stick with it.

Against Bad Players: Bad players have no idea what's going on. They'll call you regardless, because they aren't concerned with what you have.

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They want to improve their own hand, so they'll call just about anything.

You lost a Series of Hands: Players will expect you to make some crazy moves to make your money back (playing on tilt). They'll be ready to call you down.

Again, bluffing should be used sparingly. Here are some scenarios where a typical bluff should be taken into consideration:

The RIGHT Time to Bluff

Against Weak or Tight Players: Once you have a general idea of how your opponents play, your biggest targets would be pounding the weak and tight players who tend to fold easily. However, bluffing too early won't make them budge; they may not believe you have a better hand or maybe holding a strong hand of their own. (Refer to the table image section)

Few Players in the Pot: It's easier to trick a few individuals (1-3) rather than a small group. Fewer hand out there, the chances of someone making a reasonable hand are slim.

Everyone has checked and you're last to act:

Betting will force a few players out of the pot, but not all (also known as squeezing). It's pretty common to see someone bluff and bet on the button, so most of the time players will call because they won't believe you have the better hand. It's also a good strategy to see where you stand.

You Bet Preflop and Missed: You're holding an A♠Q♠ and bet preflop, and the flop comes down K♣-8♠-5♦. Other player's may still think your hand is strong because of your bet preflop. So a bet on the flop would make your opponents thinking you've hit nicely on the flop.

Player's Fear You: If you won a hand through a good play, and see your opponent a bit aggravated or show respect by commenting on your hand, then trick them in the future by running the same play that beat them. They will more likely fold to your bluff if you play it right.

Semi-Bluffing

A semi-bluff is a partial bluff with some truth in that play. With a semi bluff, you can either win by them folding right then, by improving to the best hand, or by catching a scare card and betting out on the following round. You should have general knowledge of calculating odds before attempting a semi-bluff. Here are a few examples of when to semi-bluff.

Example 1: You're holding 8♥8♦ in the pocket, someone raises preflop and you call. The flop is a rainbow of 3♣-♦-9♠. It's likely your opponent has overcards (AK, KQ, A10). You don't want your opponent to catch any of his cards on the turn or river so bet to get the pot then and there.

Example 2: You are holding a J♦10♦ and the flop comes down as Q♠-9♦-5♦. At this point you have an open-ended straight draw and a flush draw. You should be concerned with someone having the king or ace of hearts. So betting at the pot might make them fold or give you an idea of where you stand.

Poker Tells

A habit, behavior, or physical reaction that gives other players information about your hand or play is called a tell. Most poker pros pick up on tells to determine if their opponent has a strong hand or straight out bluffing. A player may also use false tells to fool players.

The Eyes Never Lie: Many players can't help but stare at big hole cards at a longer period of time. If a player is looking to steal the pot, he may look to the left to see the number of active players remaining for an opening bet (See How to Bet). People rarely can look someone straight in the eyes while being dishonest.

Facial Expressions: Showing unhappiness in your face indicates that your hand is weak. Confidence indicates you have a strong hand. Also, facial ticks or nervousness are signs of weakness.

Weak is Strong and Strong is Weak: When a player has a monster hand, they usually pretend to act disinterested in playing that hand saying phrases

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like, "Oh, is it my turn?" or "I guess I will play this hand." Covering up for their strong hand.

Trembling and Shaky Hands: A byproduct of anxiety; nervousness usually represents a monster hand.

Glance at Chips: A quick glance at their chips after the flop, turn, or river indicates a plan of attack; usually meaning they have a strong hand. But beware, some may use this tactic to scare you off.

Peeking at Hole Cards After Flop: Typically, players peek to see if one of their cards are connecting a flush draw or a straight draw.

Body Language: Dropped or slumped shoulders indicate weakness and sitting up right or being very attentive indicates strength. Leaning forward indicates an aggressive player, but remember, strong is weak and weak is strong.

Chip Stacking: Loose-aggressive players (maniacs) have sloppy and unorganized stacks. Tight-conservative players keep neat and well organized stacks.

Choosing Your Starting Hand Preflop

Before we discuss what hands to play and how to play them, there's a condition you should be aware of. Generally, no limit texas holdem is a situational guessing game. You should never fall into the habit of playing a hand in a specific way. High quality poker player's will "pick up" your pattern of plays and will eventually use that against you. Try to mix it up as much as you can. Shift gears to keep you opponents guessing. Secondly, texas holdem is a mixture of psychological warfare and mental calculation. You should have a general understanding of how to calculate poker odds before proceeding to read this section...

AA & KK Preflop

While you love seeing them as your starting hand, most people think pocket aces or kings should be slowplayed. Pocket Aces or kings are not slow playing hands. These hands can easily be cracked by

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two pair, trips, etc... I would suggest calculated raises preflop to ensure you're in the lead.

Early-Position with AA/KK: In early position or "under the gun", I would generally limp-in (just call) and hopefully get someone to raise; I would reraise about the size of the pot.

Mid-Position with AA/KK: If someone raises before me I would reraise the size of the pot.

Late-Position with AA/KK: I would obviously put up a raise if no one bets, or put up a reraise if someone raises in early position. If someone reraises my raise, I'd move all in...

AK Preflop

If you're in an early position, it usually means you're one of the first three players to the LEFT of the dealer.

Of course, if you're small blind, that means you're almost last to act before the flop, but first to act AFTER the flop.

If you're big blind, that means you're last to act pre-flop, but second to act after the flop.

And last but not least, if you're the THIRD player to the left, that means you are the FIRST to act before the flop, and third to act after the flop... This position is also known as "under the gun".

Ok. Enough with the definitions. Re-read those four above paragraphs if you're confused. Otherwise, let's dive into the strategies...

As we discussed a few days ago, Big Slick is a "monster" hand that most players pray for... BUT...

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it can actually be a TERRIBLE hand for you if you don't know what you're doing.

It can be terrible if...

1. You go "all in" (or bet a substantial pile of chips) before the flop, but then don't catch anything...

Or...

2. You catch an ace or king on the flop, bet a lot of chips, but then get run down by another player who gets a better hand.

Since even a pair of DEUCES can beat Big Slick by itself, I recommend that you don't go all-in with Big Slick before the flop. It's just too risky. Because there are so many hands that can beat you.

Going all-in with Big Slick pre-flop is the equivalent to saying, "Hey, I'm not that confident I can win this game, so I'm going to HOPE to get LUCKY and risk all my chips on the CHANCE that an ace or king hits, or that my ace high wins."

Obviously that's not ALWAYS the case, but for the most part it's pretty accurate. The second scenario- getting run down by another player even though you hit your ace or king- can be EXTREMELY frustrating.

For example, let's say you're holding Big Slick and the flop comes out A,K,5. You're obviously excited because you flopped top two pair... but what if Marty, that new guy who just learned how to play Hold'em a couple weeks ago, is holding a pair of fives?

Chances are, he's going to clean you out for all your chips.

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Your strategy then, should be to DECREASE the chances that someone at the table (like Marty) is going to get lucky on the flop.

And you do that by making sure they don't even SEE the flop in the first place, by making a pre-flop raise or strong bet.

The ultimate goal should be to create "heads-up" action before the flop when you get dealt Big Slick. Force players like Marty to fold before the flop hits.

That will prevent the "bad beats" and allow you to focus on a single opponent.

The most difficult way to win with Big Slick is if you're in an early position AND you don't catch anything good on the flop.

Here's how I play it:

Let's say I'm "under the gun" (first to act before the flop... third player to the left of the dealer) in a no-limit cash game.

I look down to see AK of diamonds.

Great hand, terrible positioning.

Instead of limping in and letting all the crap hands at the table see the flop, I make a raise as we discussed.

"\$15 to play."

Some players will limp-in with AK when they're first to act, hoping someone ELSE will make the raise for them (which gives them the chance to re-raise).

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I don't like this strategy. Because if someone else makes the initial raise, that means they get control over the table and betting.

For example, let's say I limp-in and Josh makes it \$25 to play. Everyone else folds and then I come back over the top of him for \$100 more.

Without hesitation, Josh goes all-in and pushes in his stack of \$350 in chips. See how this could get ugly?

Josh may be holding pocket 9's for all I know... which will BEAT me if I don't catch the right cards on the flop. Then again, he might be holding a pair of face cards... or maybe just AJ.

No matter what, I really don't care. Because I don't want to risk all my chips on AK and leave my night up to chance.

As much as possible, I want to be in FULL CONTROL of my destiny at the card table. There will inevitably be players who are more reckless with their chips- and these are the players who rely on LUCK more than SKILL...

But not me... I know I can beat the game, which is why I don't limp-in here when I'm first to act with Big Slick.

OK, back to the hand...

"\$15 to play", I repeat.

I'm hoping to get just one caller, or two at the most.

The action goes around the table, and everyone mucks their hands... except for Drew. He splashes the pot and calls.

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So I've created heads-up action and taken control of the betting... exactly as I wanted to do with my monster hand in this position.

The flop hits: 2h, 9d, 7s.

I'm first to act.

Obviously, this flop is terrible... the best thing I've got going is a possible runner/runner diamonds draw.

So what do I do now?

Should I check my ace high?

No. This is where you should fire AGAIN, and continue to play aggressively... Because the flop probably didn't help Drew either.

If I CHECK, Drew will sense my weakness and might try to steal the pot.

My bet will give him the impression I'm on an overpair and have the best hand... so he'll probably muck his cards now.

Even if he calls, I'm still in good shape. If the turn card doesn't help me, I'll back down and minimize my losses. I DON'T want to dig myself in a deeper hole and try to bluff it out.

Or I may catch my top pair on the turn or river and be able to win that way.

So no matter what happens, I'm not risking too many chips and I'm putting myself in a great position to win the hand.

Now... rewind for just a moment. What if my \$15 pre-flop bet had multiple callers?

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Having multiple players in the game would have increased the odds that someone actually benefited from the 2,9,7 flop. Which means I would NOT have made a strong bet after the flop. Instead, I would have backed down and just checked. If someone else bet strong, I would have mucked my A,K and lived to see another hand.

So THAT is how you play Big Slick under the worst of circumstances... with scraps on the board and bad positioning... and STILL have a great chance at winning a nice pot. Of course... the chances of getting AK are just 1 in 83. And the odds of getting AK suited are just 1 in 332. And that doesn't even factor in the odds related to your positioning.

QQ Preflop

You should be very cautious with pocket Queens because of the drawback of overcards (Aces or Kings) showing up on the community.

Early-Position with QQ: I'd raise a reasonable amount (Big Blind x3) to see where I stand. If anyone calls, I'd assume they might be holding overcards, aces or kings, so I'll slowly play my queens on the flop...

Mid-Position with QQ: If anyone raises before me, I would just call... No reraises with QQ.

Late-Position: Any early reraises, I would reraise them back. I would not call a reraise over my raise, with the assumption that they may have KK, AK, AA. Also, If I've identified my opponent as a tight player, then I'd fold. If my opponent was a maniac, I'd probably move all in.

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Small Pairs 22 to JJ Preflop

(22, 33, 44, 55, 66, 77, 88, 99, 1010, JJ)

With any small pair, I'd limp in (call the big blind). I'd also call one raise if I was in early or mid-position.

My main purpose with a small pair would be to hit a set (three of a kind) so I could break somebody in the pot with me.

Suited Connectors Preflop

(6♣7♣, 8♥9♥, J♠10♠, etc...)

Suited connectors are playable if you can see a flop for cheap in middle or late position. The main purpose of a suited connector is to try to make a little straight, a flush, two pair, or possibly a straight flush...

Suited Hand with High Kicker

(A♠3♠, K♦8♦, A♣5♣, etc...)

I would play these hands in late position with the intention of a flush possibility on the community. I would only limp in or call for cheap with these hands.

Note: The beautiful part about suited connectors or suited hands is that it is effortless to fold these hands. Once you don't make your straight or flush possibility, you can simply fold them away. Unlike holding an A10; If you hit your Ace, it's hard to throw it away not knowing someone may have hit two pair or ace with a higher kicker.

Junk Hands Preflop

(10♣2♦, K♥6♦, 3♠8♥, etc...)

If I feel like it's time to change gears, I'd play junk in late position, preferably on the button. Playing junk is all about your position and the man your playing. If I'm involved with a tight player, I'm pounding (betting) at the pot to steal it.

331 to 1.

Those are the odds AGAINST getting dealt an Ace and a King suited before the flop.

220 to 1.

Those are the odds AGAINST getting pocket Aces before the flop.

Monster hands like these are GREAT when you catch them... and you'll definitely have a good shot at raking in a killer pot... But the fact is, when you play poker you WON'T catch monsters very often. The same is true with wired pairs and suited connectors. When you hit with one of these hands, your opponents will usually NEVER see it coming... And once again, you'll rake in a nice pot. But how many times do you get hands like these AND hit the right cards?

Not too often.

ANYONE... no matter what their skill level... can win a pot with a monster. The SECRET to poker success, my friend, is learning how to win hands WITHOUT having the "nuts" or great cards. It's what separates the AVERAGE card players from the poker LEGENDS.

So how do you play hands that are DECENT, but not GREAT? Hands like QJ, J10, 9-10, Q10, K10, K9, and so on...

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If you FOLD every time you see cards like these, you're playing too tight. Because you're going to see these types of hands A LOT.

To WIN... consistently... at Texas Holdem poker, you've got to learn how to WIN with hands that AREN'T great.

But how? I'll tell you how...

The key is POSITIONING. That's the magic word. In Texas Holdem, positioning is EVERYTHING... You can see a hand in one position and the right play is to FOLD it... And then see the SAME EXACT HAND in a different position and the right play is to make a BET.

For example, let's say you're in an 8-player no-limit Holdem game... where the blinds are \$1-2. You're first to act before the flop (a.k.a. "under the gun") and look down at your cards: Queen and a jack... offsuit.

What do you do?

Playing the hand shouldn't cross your mind. Calling with a Q,J offsuit can easily turn into TROUBLE when first to act. Because SOMEONE at your 8-man table is probably going to throw out a pre-flop raise.

Think about it...

How many times does the action go COMPLETELY around the table before the flop without SOMEONE making a raise? Not too often. Even if it's just a small \$5 raise... you don't want to pay \$7 with your Q,J offsuit just to see the flop. After all, even if you HIT top pair, you're STILL going to be one of the first to act, if not THE first. What then? Your kicker isn't too strong, and you don't have a

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read on the other players. It's just a bad situation to be in... Which is why I muck "decent" hands like these when I'm under the gun or in an early position. And you should too.

Now let's say you're fourth to act before the flop (sixth position at the table) and you peek down at a Queen, 10 offsuit. Your positioning isn't great, but it's not too bad either. The action is on you to call the \$2 big blind...

What do you do?

Instead of mucking, this is where I'd limp in and call the blind.

The key is to pay \$2... don't raise it.

You've got a good chance at seeing the flop for just \$2 and you won't have to act first after the flop hits. Even if someone throws out a small pre-flop raise, you can call and see a cheap flop without getting into too much trouble.

Now let's say you're on the BUTTON (dealer position) with a Queen, Jack offsuit. Four of your opponents limp-in and the action is to you.

What's the play?

This is where I'd make a pre-flop raise. Nothing crazy... just a small \$5 that's not going to get me into trouble. And I'll do this with any good positioning, not just when I'm on the button...

Here's why:

First, it gets rid of the "crap" hands at the table... Anytime you can force the scraps at the table to fold, your odds of winning the pot increase. (The reason you don't want them in the

hand is in case one of them gets lucky on the flop.) Second, I get to see what my opponents do AFTER the flop... before I have to act. This is a HUGE advantage. I can get a read on everyone else's hand... and NO ONE gets a read on mine. Use this advantage EVERY chance you get. And third, my bet gives me relative control over the table... and is likely to result in a free card if I want one. Let's say the flop hits 9,10,2 (an open-ended straight draw with my QJ). There's a good chance my opponents will CHECK, because they anticipate another bet from me. So I'm in a win-win situation... I can throw out a semi-bluff bet... or... I can see a free card by checking. Getting control over the board also puts me in a position to buy the pot if I sense weakness at the table.

Which brings me to another point... Positioning is a fundamental part of Texas Holdem, but you had better have a good read on your opponents in order to win the hand. And you'd better know the right size to make your bets... and what to do if there's a draw on the board... and how to bluff if you get into trouble.

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Calculating Texas Holdem Odds

Players use texas holdem odds to determine their actions. The chances of finishing a flush or a straight, the probability of getting an overcard, the percentage of times you're going to flop a set to match your pocket pair are all important factors. Knowledge of these texas holdem odds and statistics are the key to winning. Here are the different factors and probabilities you should consider.

Outs: The number of cards left in the deck that will improve your hand. For example, you're holding A♥2♥, and the flop comes down as 6♥-10♥-K♠. There are 9 'outs' or 9 heart cards that can help you improve your hand into a flush.

Pot Odds: Texas holdem odds when analyzing the current size of the pot versus your next call. For example, again, if you're holding A♥2♥ and there is already \$200 in the pot and your opponent bets \$200, it's not worth calling because if you don't

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hit another♥ , you'll lose a lot. But if your opponent bets \$20 at a \$200 pot, then your pot odds are good if you hit that flush; if you don't hit that flush, you've only lost a small amount.

Bet Odds: The texas holdem odds you get as a result of evaluating the number of callers to a raise. For instance, your A♥2♥ has a 30% chance of hitting. Knowing that 4 out of 5 opponents (or a hand full of other players) are going to call my bet, my bet odds are good.

Implied Odds: The texas holdem odds you are getting after the assumed result of betting for the remainder of the hand. If you think your opponents will call you on the turn and river, your implied odds are excellent.

4/2 Rule

The 4/2 rule is a simple method of determining the percentage of you hitting a card. Let's use the A♥2♥ once more: The flop comes down as 6♥-10♥-K♠; you have 9 outs or 9 heart cards (3♥4♥5♥7♥8♥9♥J♥Q♥K♥) that can improve your hand into a flush. If you multiply 9 outs times 4, your percentage for hitting that heart card on the turn is 36%. Let's say the turn isn't a heart card, your percentage of hitting a heart card on the river would be 18%: multiply 9 outs times 2. Remember, the 4/2 rule is your outs multiplied by 4 before the turn. And if you miss on the turn, multiply your outs by 2 before the river to give you an estimated percentage of hitting.

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