Poker Pro's Corner: Table talk - Try using your inside voice

by Phil Laak

Q: Is it ever OK to discuss your hand out loud at the table?

PHIL LAAK - Phil Laak is a successful cash-game player and respected tournament foe. Born in Dublin, Ireland, he now lives in California, when not roaming Las Vegas with girlfriend Jennifer Tilly. CNS Photo courtesy of Joe Coomber. - Margaret, Portland, Ore.

A: It's always OK, but it's never encouraged. It's usually very enjoyable when two Internet guys start dissecting a hand because you can always learn from that. I prefer to do my learning behind closed doors because it's not good to tip off a player who hasn't learned of a concept like stealing via a squeeze play or when to take three cards versus when not to or whose stacks you should be attacking, that sort of thing. If you spend your time learning and thinking about the game, what's the point in talking about it? It's like playing capture the flag, then having an open meeting about where you hid your flag and letting your opponents hear. Make it harder for them.

Now if you want to throw out misinformation, that's always fun. You don't need to impress friends or influence people and have them think you know poker. Your objective is to walk away with more than you started with.

Q: What size raises are you calling with middle pocket pairs in late position?

Mark, Las Vegas

A: I will call if I have the amount that I have to put in times 12 in my chip stack. Let's say the person raises to four units and I have four times 12 and the other person has that same amount, meaning I can win 12 times the amount that is in the pot. You are going to hit a set about one in seven times, and I like to have a

12:1 ratio on a small pocket pair. If I have pocket fives and a guy bets about $200 and I only have $800 in front of me, I am never calling. If I had $2,200 or $2,300, somewhere in that range, and the other person had the same amount or more so I could get paid off with my set, that's fine.

Q: How do you like to play A-Q suited at an aggressive table in early position in the middle stages of a tournament?

- Kim, New York City

A: I like to first come into the pot with a standard raise, three times the big blind, and hopefully just win the pot right there. If someone calls and someone else raises and it gets kind of crazy, you can just fold right there. If someone just calls and I flop a queen, I am definitely going to continue betting, and even if I miss I am going to continuation bet because first action is really a strong spot. If both players miss the flop, first to bet has the better chance of winning the pot. So I will play it and I will be happy to have been dealt it because it usually takes a long time to see a hand as nice as A-Q.

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Known as The Unabomber and a hooded madman at the poker table, Phil Laak actually has reasons for his rhymes. A successful cash-game player and respected and feared tournament foe, Laak has proven over the years that he is one of the mad geniuses of this game. Phil resides in California when he's not roaming Vegas with girlfriend Jennifer Tilly, but he was actually born in Dublin. He took time out from his often-manic thoughts to put together some cogent answers to readers' questions.

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