Poker Pro's Corner: The time is right for a big raise

by Jon Friedberg

Q: How do I play hands like A-Q suited in the blinds with a couple of limpers in the middle stages of a tournament?

- Bruce, Delray Beach, Fla.

A: I like to make a big raise there and just win the pot right there, or in a worst- JON FRIEDBERG - Jon Friedberg won a World Series of Poker bracelet in 2006 and made a 2007 WSOP final table in pot-limit hold'em. CNS Photo. case scenario, get it down to one player. I almost always make a raise there, but I occasionally will check it. I would say 75 percent of the time I'm going to make a pot-size or bigger-than-pot-size raise there to try to get everybody out or to try and narrow it down to one other player.

Q: How much attention should I be paying to my table? Should I be watching everything to pick up info?

- iPod Sally, Elizabeth, Ind.

A: Yes, definitely! For the first three or four orbits you should really pay a lot of attention. Any time a new player comes to the table you should pay attention to that player. I think the first 30 minutes are probably enough to get a good understanding and categorize the players you are up against. After the first half-hour I think it's OK to start text messaging or listening to your iPod or whatever, but I think it is important to watch and listen to people for the first 30 minutes.

Q: How do you decide if you should play just to cash if you are near the bubble, or should you not care and turn the heat up?

A: It depends on the size of the bubble. If it is an online tournament and the bubble is the lowest payout, $15 for a $10 buy-in tournament, then you turn the heat up. If it is a $10,000 buy-in tournament and the lowest payout is $20,000, then I think it depends on the size of the lowest payout and the size of that relative to the buy-in and relative to your bankroll. Any time that the money is very important to you, then I think you should just play tighter to try and make it to the money. The bigger the lowest payout is, the more conservative you should play on the bubble if you are on a short stack.

Q: What is your opinion on straddles in cash games? Is this a bad bet? Should you do it and how should you play against someone who likes to straddle?

- Ima Donkey, Dania, Fla.

A: If you are comfortable playing big pots and your opponents are not comfortable playing big pots, then I think it's good to straddle. You are basically doubling the stakes of the game and if people were comfortable playing double the stakes in that game, then they would probably be playing double those stakes. If you are comfortable playing in a bigger pot, then it's always good to straddle when your opponents are not comfortable because it's easier to bluff. If you are the tight one and you are up against loose players, then I think that it's stupid to straddle.

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Thirty-four-year-old professional Jon Friedberg sat down this month to answer readers' questions. While attending college in Arizona, Friedberg started playing a bit and since then has sat at his fair share of poker tables, even picking up a bracelet at the World Series of Poker in 2006 in a $1,000 no-limit hold'em event with a massive field of 2,891 players. The Vegas resident now has 15 cashes for close to $1 million. In addition to his bracelet, Jon made a 2007 WSOP final table in pot-limit hold'em, was ninth in the 2007 PokerStars Caribbean Adventure and finished eighth in the WPT's Mirage Poker Showdown last year.

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