

Lucky Dog Poker: Are you guilty of "string bets" at the table? Don't be

by Russ Scott

Questions about illegal "string bets" and when to make a pot-sized bet highlight LuckyDog Poker's e-mailbag this week.

This situation came up at a recent home game. The blinds are \$5,000 and \$10,000. Player "A" announces a raise, and as he does, he sets \$20,000 in chips out past his cards and his chip stack. Does this action constitute a string raise? "Jeff S.

No, this is not a string raise, Jeff. The player apparently said, "Raise," either BEFORE he moved his chips forward or AS he was putting them into the pot. Both actions are legit, since he said, "Raise."

The amount he put in also was legit (a minimum raise, double the big blind), so technically he didn't have to announce he was raising because he made one motion with a correct amount of raising chips.

A string raise occurs when a player first calls a bet (\$10,000 in this example) without saying anything, then reaches back to his stack to get more chips, intending to raise. Even if he says, "Raise," at that point, the raise is not allowed in most card rooms.

The raise also would be disallowed if the player had said, "I'll call your \$10,000, and raise you \$10,000." Once he says the word "call," he can't raise or fold "he can only call. Verbal declarations are binding.

If a player says, "Raise," before moving any chips forward, he can first put in enough chips to call, then go back to his stack one time for raising chips. If he announces the amount of the raise before doing anything else, he can make multiple forward motions with chips until his bet equals the amount he announced.

It almost always is best to say "raise" before acting, Jeff, because then you can take a minute to calculate how much you want to raise (in a no-limit or pot-limit game), and there won't be any confusion at the table.

Jeff also asked: The betting on a hand has gotten to the river. Player "B" is first to act and checks. Player "A" bets, and "B" calls. Who is first to show down cards: "B," who has acted first throughout the hand, or "A," whose bet was called?

Player "A" is supposed to show his hand first, Jeff. He is the last player to make a bet or raise that was called by another player. Calling a bet gives you the right to see your opponent's hand before showing yours. If your opponent has you beat, you can muck your hand face-down if you wish.

I don't recommend mucking, however. Just turn your hand up, even if you think you're beat, because "cards speak for themselves." That way, if you accidentally overlook a winning hand, you still would take the pot because you showed the best hand.

I think I am getting a feel for when to bet half the pot, three-fourths or when to make a pot-sized bet. But I see guys betting triple or quadruple the pot, and I am not sure if that is a good investment. I usually think they don't have a strong hand and they are chasing something, trying to get rid of any callers. What do you think?
â€” Bob B. of Manitowoc, Wisc.

You're correct, Bob. A lot of tournament players have developed the habit of over-betting the pot to drive out opponents. I think it's often a dangerous play because if an opponent has called or made a pre-flop raise, then stayed in on the flop, how can you be sure you can drive him out with an overbet?

I'm not a fan of risky play in the early and middle stages of a tourney. My suggestion is to identify players who make this move more often than seems reasonable, then pick a good spot and trap them with your slow-played big hand.

As far as your betting patterns go, experience will teach you when a small bet or raise will win a pot with minimal risk, or when a pot-sized or larger bet is needed to drive out an opponent.

One more thing: Don't be predictable, especially if you're facing the same players a lot. For example, if you always make a pot-sized bet when you flop trips and only bet half the pot size when you flop top pair, opponents will catch on. Mix it up some so they'll never know for sure the strength of your hand.

E-mail your poker questions and comments to russ@luckydogpoker.com for use in future columns.

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