Poker Pro's Corner: Short-handed game will play more hands

by Antonio Esfandiari

Q: In a $1-$2 no-limit six-handed cash game, am I playing a lot more hands because it is short-handed, or because the tables are usually pretty loose?

ANTONIO ESFANDIARI - Antonio Esfandiari, 'The Magician,' is known for his sleight-of-hand prowess. He has won bracelets at the World Series of Poker and titles on the World Poker Tour. His is one of the most recognizable faces in poker today and makes Las Vegas his home. CNS Photo. - Juan C., Barcelona

A: You are playing more hands because it is short-handed. If it is a really loose table you should play tighter, but for the most part because it is six-handed you want to play more hands.

Q: I find it very hard to lay down top pair. What sort of things am I looking for to know when I am beat?

- Broke in Biloxi

A: If someone is willing to go crazy with you on the flop, you bet, they raise, you reraise and they move in on you - well, then guess what, your top pair is no good!

Q: I enjoy check-raising the minimum out of position to a raise. It usually works - they fold and I take down the pot on a bluff. How can I tell when someone is making that same play on me?

- Wondering in Walla Walla, Wash.

A: I guess you have to use your reading abilities to figure out if they are weak or strong.

Q: I often find myself bluffing a lot of my chips away. How can I combat this? Should I even be bluffing if it never seems to work?

- Future Star, Milwaukee

A: If your bluffs aren't working, why keep trying them? Try playing a session where you don't bluff at all and see if you are more successful than the times that you do bluff.

Q: I never know when I should quit a game. How long should I be playing for?

- Twenty-Four/Seven, Hilbert, Wisc.

A: You should play until you are tired or the game is not good anymore.

Q: What is the best way to play the nuts when I flop it - nut flush or a full house? If I don't really have a reputation at my table, what is the best way to play it?

- Vicky, Las Vegas

A: You should bet it right out.

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You've seen him on TV winning bracelets at the World Series of Poker (pot-limit hold'em, 2004), winning World Poker Tour titles (L.A. Poker Classic, $1.4 million) and taking down the big bucks on TV's "High Stakes Poker." Tournament pro and cash-game specialist Antonio Esfandiari, also known as "The Magician" for his sleight-of-hand prowess, is originally from Iran but moved to California at the age of 9. Now, of course, he's one of the most recognizable faces in the game and makes Vegas his home. He sat down with Online Poker Pro this month to answer readers' questions.

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