

by Phil Laak

Q: What are the best ways to learn the other games?

- Sammy, Abilene, Texas

A: The best ways to learn other games is to play micro-limits online. I learned triple low draw online playing .01/.02 and I probably played 40-60 PHIL LAAK - Phil Laak is a successful cash-game player and respected tournament foe. Born in Dublin, he now lives in California, when not roaming Las Vegas with girlfriend Jennifer Tilly. CNS Photo courtesy of Joe Coomber. hours playing deuce to seven. I learned things and at the end of 60 hours I thought I was plus equity in that game. A week later I joined a 200-400 game at the Bellagio and they assumed I would be a fish at it because they had never seen me play it. What they didn't know is that I had already logged a ton of hands and thought about the game pretty intensely. I turned a profit that week in that game and it was nice. I would definitely say play micro-limits - it's a great way to learn the game.

Q: If you triple up early in a tournament should you sit back a little bit or should you put the pressure on with your stack?

- Marcus, Paris

A: If the antes haven't kicked in yet, you should still be playing tight, squared-away poker. Once the antes kick in, the math switches up a lot. With antes the pot is laying you extra odds. If they have kicked in you are always applying delicate pressure, not too much, not too little. You have to pay careful attention to who is playing tight, who is playing loose and what position you are in.

You can't win all the chips in one day and you have to focus on increasing your stack, not losing it. You

don't want to be playing hands out of position against stacks bigger than yours who know how to play solid poker. You don't want to be getting involved with marginal hands for large pots. You want to be attacking the medium-size stacks, not the super big ones behind you or the small stacks that are just looking for something nice that they can stick it all-in with. Pre-antes - careful, tighter poker; post-antes - loosen up a little bit but not at the risk of your stack.

Q: You have A-K suited on the button in a tournament. The blinds are 150-300 and you have about 13,000 chips. A solid player in early position raises it three times the big blind. What is your play? Should you reraise there or just smooth-call with position?

- Chris G., London

A: If one of the guys in the small or big blind is a crafty player and is fond of the squeeze play, then I call every time. What I mean by squeeze play is a player that thinks I am just limping with a hand like 9-J of hearts and the guy that opened could have A-2 of spades or 5-6 of clubs, so they are just going to put in a raise with anything to try and snap off both guys. If I think one of those squeeze players - aggressive and smart - is on my left, then I flat-call hoping the guy makes a squeeze play and then I can reraise.

Given a more normal variation, like 80-90 percent of the time, that won't happen and most of the time I am going to raise and get information right there. If the raise came from first position half the time, I am going to raise and half the time I am going to flat-call, it depends on the player. If it is a faster player I am going to raise more often and if it is the more careful player then I will just call. I'm not going to fold, though.

- - -

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-maniac

thoughts to put together some cogent answers to readers' questions.

Â© Copley News Service

*Poker Pro's Corner: Learn to play online, not at the table by Phil Laak*