

## **PLAYING TEXAS HOLD 'EM**

Hold 'em is probably the best known and most popular form of poker today.

Each player starts with two hole cards. There are three rounds of community cards. These are dealt face up, for every player to use, with betting after each round. Players make the best 5-card hand using any combination of the five community cards and two hole cards.

Each new hand begins with a small blind, a big blind, and a round of betting. The betting rules vary depending upon whether the game is Limit, Pot Limit or No Limit.

Once the first round of betting is complete, the dealer then puts out the first three community cards, or "the flop". There is a round of betting. The dealer then puts out the fourth community card or "the turn". There is a round of betting. The dealer then puts out the fifth community card or "the river". There is a final round of betting. After the last round of betting, the pot is awarded to the best hand.

All Hold 'em games include a small blind and big blind. These are forced bets, and are determined by the position of the button. These bets are considered live, and every player in the hand must either call the big blind, raise, or fold. The button moves clockwise around the table, giving each player a turn being the button, small blind, and big blind.

In Limit Hold 'em, each betting round has a fixed bet. In \$5/\$10, the small blind is \$2.50, the big blind is \$5, and the first two rounds of betting are in increments of \$5. The last two rounds of betting are in increments of \$10. There is a maximum of three re-raises per betting round.

In Pot Limit, a player can bet any amount from the minimum bet to the size of the pot. In

a \$5/\$10 pot-limit game, the small blind is \$5 and the big blind is \$10. The first player can call the big blind (in this case, \$10), or raise to any amount up to the size of the pot.

A raise must either equal or exceed the previous bet or raise. In this case, a pot-sized raise would be \$25 (\$5 small blind + \$10 big blind + \$10 call), meaning that, in total, player three can bet up \$35. Supposing player three makes a pot-sized raise, the total pot is now \$50.

If the next player wants into the hand, they must call \$35, which is the size of player three's bet. If they want to raise the maximum, they would bet \$120, which equals the size of the pot (\$50) plus a \$70 raise (\$35 call + \$35 raise).

In No Limit, a player can bet any amount from the minimum bet to the maximum number of chips they have in front of them. As in pot limit, a \$5/\$10 No Limit game means blinds of \$5 and \$10.

Here are some general guidelines for pocket cards. They are not steadfast, but can give you something to go by. Of course, the (S) means suited.

### **The Strongest Starting Hands:**

**PAIR of HIGH CARDS** - AA, KK, QQ, JJ, 1010

**ACE and HIGH CARD SUITED** - AK(S), AQ(S), AJ(S), A10(S)

**FACES SUITED** - KQ(S), KJ(S), QJ(S)

**ACE KING** – AK

### **Medium Strength Starting Hands:**

**FACE TEN SUITED** - K10(S), Q10(S), J10(S)

**MEDIUM PAIRS** - 99, 88, 77

**TWO HIGH CARDS** - AQ, AJ, A10 (ace king ranks higher, above), KQ down to J10

**ACE and MEDIUM SUITED** - A9(S), A8(S), A7(S)

**MEDIUM SUITED CONNECTORS (No Gap/One Gap)** - J9(S), 109(S), 108(S), 98(S), 97(S) down to 75(S)

**Other Conditional Starting Hands:**

**LOW PAIRS** - 66, 55, 44, 33, 22

**ACE and LOW SUITED** - A6(S), A5(S), A4(S), A3(S), A2(S)

**LOW SUITED CONNECTORS (No Gap/One Gap)** - 65(S), 64(S), 54(S), 53(S)  
(lowest)

One of the biggest factors in knowing how to play hold 'em poker effectively is being aware of your position.

## **POSITION**

Position is simply where you are sitting in relation to the dealer's button. In hold em and many other poker games, your position at the table is a big factor. The strength of your position comes from the fact that the betting goes in a clockwise fashion.

In a favorable position you get to see how many other players react to their hands and whether they fold, bet, or call before you do. The poker phrase, "Position is power" comes from this simple idea.

There are many names associated with position to identify where players are sitting in relation to the dealer's button. Each particular position has its own strengths or weaknesses.

- The player to the left of the dealer is not only the small blind, but must act first after the flop.
- The player to the left of the small blind is the big blind. He or she is already obligated to the game and is in another early position after the flop.
- The player to the left of the big blind is "under the gun". This player is the first to act pre-flop and is considered to be in the worst position, even though

they do not act first in any other betting round (the blinds would) because they would have to invest an entire bet to get into the action.

- The player with the dealer's button is the last to act after the flop and has the most advantageous position. They are called "the dealer", "on the button", or just "the button".
- The player to the right of the button is called "the cutoff", which comes from the fact that this position is one of the best for blind-stealing at a full nine-handed or ten-handed table. This player often cuts off the dealer by betting before they have a chance to bet.
- Players in all positions are referred to as being in early, middle, or late position. Players in an early position are the first ones to act in a betting round (like the player under the gun) and late position players (like the cutoff and the button) are some of the last to act.

The importance of your position varies on many factors. For example, in no limit hold 'em position is much more important than in limit hold 'em. It is always better to be in a late position though, so it is important to identify what hands are generally playable in all positions.

Let's say you're under the gun. You have Queen-Ten, unsuited and decide to limp into the pot. The player who bets after you raises, and everyone but you folds. Now you're in a jam. Chances are good that this player has a better hand than you. If they have any ace, king, or pocket pair, they are statistically better than you.

You'd suspect that someone who raised has at least a hand like that. Now you can either call again or go into the flop as an underdog or you can fold and just give up the bet. What's worse is that if you call, you will be acting before this player for the rest of the hand.

On the other hand, let's say you're on the button. You have Queen-Ten, unsuited and everybody folds to you. One option would be to fold and let the blinds fight it out. Another would be the just call and see what happens on the flop. Many players here

would raise because you could steal the blinds and even if you didn't, you'd act after them for the remainder of the hand. Raising is only a viable option because of your favorable position.

Another notable factor is that position goes hand in hand with knowing the players directly around you. For example, an aggressive, blind-stealing player to the immediate right of a tight player usually results in the tight player's blinds getting stolen.

Being in late position with a good hand has major strengths over being early with a good hand. Early position raisers are assumed to have a good hand and it tends to scare players away.

Early pre-flop raises force opponents to call two bets at once - at least in the case of no limit - with nothing in the pot yet. In late position, there may be players who have already called one bet. Those players only have to call one bet (in limit) with a little something already in the pot. So players in late position with a good hand have the ability to manipulate the pot.

While position is important, you will also need to calculate the best chances you have to pull out the card you need to win. We call these pot odds and outs.