

Gus Hansen: Playing the Main Event

Tips for the readers of [key:IC]

This week starts the largest, richest tournament in poker history – the Main Event of the World Series of Poker*. For anyone who makes it deep in the tournament, there will be several long, exhausting days of poker. So, going in rested is extremely important. Beyond that, however, there are ways to approach different portions of the event that could help you develop and maintain a healthy stack.

In the early stages of a large tournament like the Main Event, chances are you'll be seated with nine players who are complete strangers to you. Most of them will probably not be all that strong. Also, at this point in the event, you'll have a lot of chips compared to the size of the blinds. In these portions of the tournament, you should try to slowly build your stack. You don't need to double up quickly and you don't want to commit a lot of chips to the pot unless you're pretty certain you know where you stand.

This is not to say that you should be tight pre-flop. Actually, when playing against weak opponents while holding lots of chips, you should try to see more flops as cheaply as you can. You can limp, call raises or even raise with a wide variety of hands, and then proceed from there. Most of the time, you won't hit the flop very hard, but in those hands where you're forced to fold, you won't have lost much. When you do manage to catch a hand, you'll pick up a lot of chips from players who don't make very good decisions much of the time. You can use your skill advantage to balance your wins and losses, and slowly build



your stack.

As the tournament moves along, many will bust and the fields will get tougher. The players you'll encounter later in the tournament are more likely to make good decisions post-flop. Some will be excellent players – even top pros who are capable of very good reads. At these points in the tournament, you'll have a lot of chips, but the blinds will be much higher; the average stack may only have 25 or 30 big blinds.

This is also the time when you need to be more willing to gamble. By „gamble“ I don't mean that you need to over-commit with a hand where you're hoping for a race. Rather, there are some situations where you might be compelled to put all your chips in the pot, even when you're not thrilled with your hand.

For example, in the early levels of a tournament, I'm unlikely to commit my entire stack with a hand like top-pair, top-kicker – it's just not strong enough. But later in the event, I'm likely to have no choice but to commit all of my chips if I have Ace- King and hit a King on the flop. To me, going with this kind of hand is something of a gamble.

These are some general guidelines to playing large tournaments. By seeing lots of flops early, you're likely to build your stack slowly by taking advantage of your skills post-flop. And later, you'll do better to tighten up and look for opportunities that require a little more gambling.

If you're playing in the Main Event, keep these thoughts in mind and good luck!