

Phil Gordon: Not Playing By The Book

Tips for the readers of [key:IC]

Once I am involved in a hand, many of the actions I take after the flop are automatic, or nearly automatic. Therefore, the most important decision I have to make in No Limit Hold ,em takes place before the flop:

Should I play the two cards I've been dealt?

When I first started learning how to play, I reviewed the standard charts that suggest which two cards to play from each position. But while they provided useful guidelines, the charts don't tell the whole story.

Poker is not a game that is best played by the numbers. Poker is a game of situations.

In blackjack, there is always a correct decision to be made – a „perfect strategy.“ Once you have compared the strength of your hand against the dealer's „up“ card, the odds will – or at least should – dictate whether you should hit, stand, split, etc.



Poker, however, is a game of incomplete information. There are many factors to consider that go above and beyond what „the book“ tells you to do. Some of them include:

My opponents' tendencies

My state of mind

My opponent's state of mind

Our respective stack sizes

My image at the table

Computer programs can look up hands in a chart. Real poker players analyze situations and make their own decisions after processing all of the available information. I might raise with A-J from early position in one game, and fold the same hand from the same position in another.

A good chart can help give a very specific set of circumstances, namely:

You are the first person to voluntarily put money into the pot and are going to come in for a raise of about three times the big blind

You don't know much about your opponents

All the players at the table have an average-size stack

The blinds are relatively small in relation to the size of the stacks

When the above things aren't true, you'll want to look beyond the charts.

If you're a new player, these tables are a great place to start. The more poker you play, however, the more comfortable you will feel letting your experience and your instincts serve as your guide.