

Poker Tip #5

Jan 06, 2013

Tip Subject: Managing a Tournament – Early Stage.

Situation: In the simplest form, a poker tournament can be divided into three stages:

Stage 1: Early
Stage 2: Middle
Stage 3: Late

This tip will deal only with Stage 1. ...Early.
Stages 2 and 3 will be covered in upcoming weeks.

What is the Early Stage? :

The Early Stage will vary with each tournament structure.
You can't really put a number on when you move from the early stage to the middle stage.

However, to use a typical blind structure it will generally include the first 3 blind levels as below:

- 60 minutes.
- The first three blind levels :

25-50	20 minutes
50-100	20 minutes
100-200	20 minutes

There is a lot written about the early stage of a tournament, and most authors advocate the same strategy....as written below:

Phil Gordon:

Tournaments are about survival. Doubling up early means much less regarding your chances of winning than doubling up with several tables remaining. The fewer 50-50 chances I take, the better off I am.

I've found very tight play – squeaky tight, some might say – during the first several levels to be very valuable.

- I build the image of a tight player, and I'm able to exploit this when the blinds go up.
- I don't risk losing a lot of chips with weak and moderate hands, like A-J, KQ or Medium pairs out of position.
- The blinds really are too small to be worth stealing.
- I have a chance to sit back and watch – to learn the other players.

Dan Harrington:

Play tight, pick off some small pots and try to stay even or a little ahead of the increasing blinds. Don't jeopardize your whole stack on a toss-up situation. Just keep accumulating chips.

Mastering Hold'em Website:

Your play should be characterized as very tight during the early stage. Some authors suggest only playing three hands, AA, KK and QQ.

The reason for the tight play is to avoid busting out to one of the many "dead money" players who are playing way too many hands. Do not waste chips on draw type hands. Do not attempt to steal blinds as they are too low to be worth stealing.

Play premium cards only and play them aggressively. I am not saying you should limit yourself to only 3 hands, but your play should definitely be tight.

You can't win the tournament in the early stage - but you can surely lose it.

Conclusions

1. Play tight.
2. Play premium hands only – and play them aggressively.
3. Don't play marginal cards out of position, like A-10, KQ or medium pairs. There is simply not enough money in most pots to make it worthwhile. The risk of playing moderate hands like that, out of position, is simply not worth the reward.
4. Remember, there are a lot of "inexperienced" players playing too many hands...don't tangle with them – the risk is not worth the reward.
5. The idea is survival - to get through the "Early Stage" and then win pots when they are large enough to mean something.

Don't Despair

If you have developed the bad habit of playing too many hands, don't despair at all this talk of "Tight" and "Patient" poker.

You will have plenty of opportunity to play more hands as the tournament progresses into the "Middle" and "Late" stages.

That will be discussed in upcoming weeks, in:

- Managing a Tournament – Middle Stage.

- Managing a Tournament – Late Stage.

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Additional Reading

1. Every tournament is different and the “Early Stage” will be different for each, depending on:
 - a) The Number of Starting Chips.
 - b) The Size of the Starting Blinds....e.g. 25-50.
 - c) The Duration of the Blind Level....e.g. 15 minutes, 20 minutes, etc.
2. There is an important ratio between a player’s chip stack and the size of the Blinds.

It’s called the “Number of Big Blinds.”

You will hear players say things like:

“I have 60 big blinds, so I’m still ok.”
Or, “I’m in trouble. I’m down to 20 big blinds.”

Ex.: A tournament’s Starting Blinds are 25-50 with 5000 starting chips.

So, $(5000 \text{ Starting Chips}) / (50 \text{ Big Blind}) = 100 \text{ Big Blinds}$.

Then, every player starts the tournament with 100 Big Blinds.

The more Big Blinds a player has in his stack:

- The more comfortable he is.
 - The more patient he should choose to be.
3. Problem: The more Big Blinds an (inexperienced) player has, the more pots he is inclined to enter; when it should be exactly the opposite.
The more Big Blinds a player has, the more patient he should be.

Lee Childs writes an article: **TOO MANY MISTAKES**

“One of the most significant mistakes a high percentage of players make is in the early stages of a tournament.

First, they're playing too many hands. When the blinds are small and calling a raise represents a small percentage of their stack, players are willing to see flops with so many unprofitable hands.

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They also tend to try to steal blinds more frequently because 'it doesn't cost them that much.' What they fail to recognize is while it may not cost them too much to see the flop, they aren't thinking about how much it's going to cost to see the river."

"Second, any chips you spew early may not have a huge effect on your stack at that time, but as the blinds increase, the result of unnecessarily losing chips early can effect your stack later."

"So, keep all of this in mind the next time you play a tournament."

"In the early stages seeing a lot of flops because it doesn't cost so much is a huge leak that many players have.

Be patient and allow yourself to get into profitable situations before throwing those chips in the middle."

"Preserving your chips early is much more important than trying to build up a big stack. Playing too many hands, playing out of position and getting yourself into marginal spots early usually results in you busting out earlier than you should have. Decide to win!"