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**Playing Poker For The First Time**

**By Eric Madsen**

Many people are intimidated on their first visit to a public card room. Knowing what to expect and some simple rules of etiquette will help the first-time visitor relax and have a good time. Any card room with more than a few tables will have a sign-up desk or board for the various games being played. Usually someone will be standing here to take your name if a seat is not immediately available. This person can explain what games are offered, the betting limits, special house rules and so on. This is the moment of your first decision: which game and for what stakes?

Choosing a game is fairly easy; you already know which game is most familiar to you. You may be surprised to find that your favorite home games are not spread in public card rooms. Most will offer one or more of Texas Hold'em, Seven-Card Stud, and Omaha Hold'em (usually hi/lo split, 8-or-better for low). Sometimes you will find California Lowball (5-card draw for low), Seven-Card Stud hi/lo, or Hold'em variations like Pineapple. You will rarely find High Draw (5-card draw for hi), and will never find home game pot-builders like Anaconda, Follow-the-Queen, 7-27 or Guts. Except for the joker in draw poker, card rooms never use wild cards.

Choosing a betting limit is a bit harder. It is best to start playing at a limit so small that the money is not important to you. After all, with all the excitement of your first time playing poker there is no need to be worried about losing the nest egg to a table full of sharks. Betting limits are typically expressed as \$1-\$5 or \$3-\$6, and may be "spread-limit" or "structured-limit". A spread-limit means one can bet or raise any amount between the two numbers (although a raise must be at least as much as a previous bet or raise). For example, in \$1-\$5 spread-limit, if one person bets \$2 the next person is free to call the \$2 or raise \$2, \$3, \$4, or \$5, but cannot raise just \$1. On the next round, everything is reset and the first bettor may bet anything from \$1 to \$5. In structured-limit like \$3-\$6 (usually recognizable by a factor of two between betting limits), all betting and raising on early rounds is in units of \$3, and on later rounds is in units of \$6. One only has a choice of \*whether\* to bet or raise; the amount is fixed by the limit. One usually doesn't have a choice between spread and structured betting at a given limit. Keep in mind that it is quite easy to win or lose 20 "big bets" (the large number in the limit) in an hour of play. Also, since your mind will be occupied with the mechanics of the game while the regular players consider strategy, you are more likely to lose than win. In other words: choose a low limit. If the game you want is full, your name will go on a list and the person running the list will call you when a

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seat opens up. Depending on the card room., you may have trouble hearing your name called and they may be quick to pass you over, so be alert. Once a seat is available, the list person will vaguely direct you toward it, or toward a floor man who will show you where to sit.

Now is the time for you to take out your money and for the other players to look you over. A good choice for this "buy-in" is ten to twenty big bets, but you must buy-in for at least the posted table minimum, usually about five big bets. Most public poker games are played "table-stakes", which means that you can't reach into your pocket for more money during the play of a hand. It also means that you can't be forced out of a pot because of insufficient funds. If you run out of money during a hand you are still in the pot (the dealer will say you are "all-in"), but further betting is "on the side" for an additional pot you cannot win. Between hands, you are free to buy as many chips as you want, but are not allowed to take any chips off the table unless you are leaving. This final rule gives opponents a chance to win back what they have lost to you. If you bust out, you may buy back in for at least the table minimum or leave.

Once you have told the dealer how much money you are playing, the dealer may sell you chips right away or call over a chip runner to do so. You may want to tell the dealer that you are a first-time player. This is a signal to the dealer to give a little explanation when it is your turn to act, and to the other players to extend you a bit of courtesy when you slow down the game. Everyone will figure it out in a few minutes anyway, so don't be bashful. You may even ask to sit out a few hands just to see how it all works.

There are three ways that pots are seeded with money at the beginning of the hand. The most familiar to the home player is the "ante", where each player tosses a small amount into the pot for the right to be dealt a hand. The second way, often used in conjunction with an ante, is the "forced bring-in". For example, in seven-card stud, after everyone antes and is dealt the first three cards, the player with the lowest up card may be forced to bet to get things started. The third way, often used in games without up cards like Hold'em or Omaha, is a "forced blind bet". This is similar to the bring-in, but is always made by the person immediately after the player with the "button". The "button" is a plastic disk that moves around the table and indicates which player is acting as dealer for the hand (of course, the house dealer does the actual dealing of cards, but does not play). A second or even third blind may follow the first, usually of increasing size. Whichever seed method is used, note that this initial pot, small as it is, is the only reason to play at all.

If the game has blinds, the dealer may now ask you if you want to "post". This means, "do you want to pay extra to see a hand now, in bad position, and then pay the blinds, or are you willing to sit and watch for a few minutes?" Answer "no, I'll wait" and watch the game until the dealer tells you it's time to begin, usually after the blinds pass you.

Finally, it is your turn to get cards and play. Your first impression will probably be how fast the game seems to move. If you are playing stud, several up cards may be "mucked" (folded into the discards) before you even see them; if you are playing hold'em, it may be your turn to act before you have looked at your cards. After a few hands you should settle into the rhythm and be able to keep up. If you ever get confused, just ask the dealer what is going on.

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Eric is an avid poker player and frequents Las Vegas often. Eric is the webmaster of

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### **Online Poker Tips**

#### **By BetPrize**

Internet poker room is a good place to test your basic skills and define the best live poker game playing strategy for yourself. At the Internet poker room table you would have to play against possibly more skilled opponents.

The first and the main live poker game tip on our list is: do your homework, study the basic rules of poker game, memorize all possible poker hands, visit Internet poker forums, read books on poker, chat with other poker card players.

Then try a few FREE versions of an Internet poker room game at our sister site: 3-hand, 5-hand, Caribbean Stud, Texas Holdem Poker, Video Poker. They all are fun to play!

Take full advantage of live poker game deposit bonuses at the Internet poker room you choose. Almost all Internet poker rooms offer deposit bonuses for new poker players, usually from \$30 to \$50.

Place a limit on the money you are going to gamble with before you start playing live poker game.

When playing a poker game, analyze the playing habits and poker playing strategies used by your opponents at the Internet poker room table.

As a beginner do not play too many poker hands, you will be sure to loose. Play only the higher value starting hands.

With chosen low poker limits you can play live poker game for several hours for less than the cost of a movie ticket. So even if you lose a little, think of the expence as a small payment for a nicely spent evening.

Play poker at your present mastery level. If you are just a beginner poker card player, do not rush into Internet poker room tournaments, your time will come after months of improving your skill in numerous live poker games.

Learn how to fold a poker hand and when. Fold if you have nothing in your hand, do not be afraid to fold poker hands as many times as necessary.

Master the art of choosing starting poker hands, employing pot odds, and aggressively betting your winning hands.

We do not claim that these free online poker tips will help you win money, this article is for information

purpose only.

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