

IMAGINE PLAYING 500 CONSECUTIVE BIG BLINDS

By Steve Blay

Have you ever been stuck in the big blind 500 hands in a row? Sounds like hell, but it just might be the best place for you to sharpen your poker skills. But there's no way for you to practically do this, nor would you want to pay the big blind 500 consecutive times. But there's a training site that let's you do this. AdvancedPokerTraining.com is a web-based software site (no download needed) that pits you against more than 100 opponents in several settings such as nine-player no-limit hold'em, six-max and sit-n-go. The game comes at you fast: You can play 500 hands an hour, and at your virtual side is your choice of 20 advisors who suggest alternate lines of play. If you can't afford a full-time pro to watch over your shoulder, this might be the next best thing.

This is a great way to plug leaks in your game, plus weekly training reports, hand replays and computerized play ratings are available. Let's get back to those 500 consecutive big-blind hands. You can waste chips tenaciously defending your blind. The flip side can be a problem, too, if opponents are observant.

If you play tight, do you defend your blinds often enough? Or can players from late position raise you with any hand? APT helps you combat this by "freezing the button" so you're buried in the blinds for every hand. This amount of repetition in a difficult situation will improve your game significantly. Imagine how long it would take to be dealt 500 big-blind hands in a regular session. APT does this in a fraction of the time, thus allowing you to learn and adapt at a much faster rate.

Here's another example: When you're the aggressor before the flop, you need to bet on the flop most of the time, even if you don't connect. It's called a continuation bet or c-bet, and it's up to you to force opponents to improve their hands or clear a path for you.



For this scenario, you can ask APT to let you play a specific hand, for example, ace-king. Before you know it, the virtual dealer will send you ace-king over and over again. With A-K, you'll raise before the flop every time. However (sorry to break this to you), you'll only flop an ace or king 32 percent of the time.

In other words, more than two out of three times you'll have to c-bet. With repetition comes confidence, and you can track your performance gains by clicking the "view stats" feature. A good c-bet goal is 75 percent, less in loose games. Some aggressive pros c-bet nearly 100 percent of the time against tight opponents.

Nothing educates more than repetition.

— Steve Blay is vice president of operations at AdvancedPokerTraining.com.

POKER PSYCHOLOGY: HEAD GAMES

YOU CAN'T EQUATE PATIENCE WITH PASSIVITY

I started this column by rethinking the value of patience in poker: "Is patience really important in poker?" I understand everyone says patience is important, but when I watch winning play I begin to question that premise.



STEPHEN BLOOMFIELD

At one point, patience was the poker mantra as tight-aggressive play was thought to be the winning style. But now I'm not so sure.

The Internet brought out hyper-aggression and agro poker. When Black Friday hit, that style flooded brick-and-mortar rooms.

Then came a time when, if you were patient, you were called a nit and wouldn't be playing much at all.

Light three-betting and four-betting became the modality.

Can this last, or will patience make a comeback? Or, did it never leave, but just morph into a different type of behavior? Should we look at patience differently?

I watched a great deal of play and had the realization we shouldn't confuse patience and passivity.

Patience is "the ability to endure waiting, delay, or provocation without becoming annoyed or upset, or to persevere calmly when faced with difficulties."

Passivity isn't acting when one should to exact the greatest potential.

In addition to patience being called a virtue, it also has been said poker constantly changes and evolves. One style begets another.

At the simplest level, if the table is tight aggressive, it may make the most sense to play a wider range of hands and play more aggressively, more loosely aggressive. Then, as the game becomes looser and more aggressive, it makes sense to play a tighter aggressive game. It may make sense to use other techniques, too.

But it seems the era of hyper-aggression may be coming to an end.

I played in several tournaments lately and have noticed players who have been aggressive are smooth-calling, limiting the size of the pot.

It may not be poker evolves, but instead, cycles. You have to be able to read the cycle and the situation to play the most optimal style. To be a high-level player, you need not only to know the math and be able to read the player, but be comfortable with all styles of play. You need to look passive, play tight and come out aggressive as much as you need to play hyper-aggressively when the situation calls for it.

Think of the various styles and adjust. Patience is good, but may not always be the best answer to the situation.

The old quadrant of tight-loose/passive-aggressive has evolved into a cyclical game. You may want to use those dichotomies to put players on a style, but don't let yourself be boxed in to any style.

Patience is an important part of play; patience is not passivity.

Patience keep your head in the game to perform at your peak.

— Dr. Stephen Bloomfield is a licensed psychologist and avid poker player. His column will give insight on how to achieve peak performance using poker psychology. Email questions for him at editor@anteupmagazine.com.