

**MORE POKER  
PLAYS YOU  
CAN USE**

Written by  
Doug Hull

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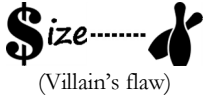


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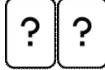

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# 1) Low strength hands that are ahead of draws are still ahead.



The Hero in this hand, Antonis, is a professional player in Greece. He was able to correctly push all-in through expert hand reading. He made an excellent read and narrowed the holdings of his opponent. Though his hand was only nut no pair, he was able to deduce he was ahead and get full value for his hand.

\$2-\$5 Greece	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
Button	Villain 	Call/Call		Covers
Small Blind	Hero <i>(Antonis Fountouris)</i>	\$20		\$485
...				

The Hero had been observing this player in particular. Most of your money at a poker table comes from the people to your immediate right. Understanding these players is often the most profitable reads you will make. This Villain was predictable in the fact that he would raise the button with good hands but try and limp in with speculative and weaker hands. His range is wide, but the limp-call severely limits the upper range of his holding. When reading a player's hand, often the lack of a raise will shrink a hand range as much as a raise will.



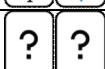
Later in the hand the personal dynamics between these players also plays a role. Hero had been using his position against Villain effectively and had showed him some bluffs earlier in the night. Animosity was growing, and the Villain was tired of being pushed around.

Let us look at Villain's range after limp calling on the button, remembering it is limited at the top end because there was no raise.

Limp-call range of this villain on button												
AA	AKs	AQs	AJs	ATs	A9s	A8s	A7s	A6s	A5s	A4s	A3s	A2s
AK	KK	KQs	KJs	KTs	K9s	K8s	K7s	K6s	K5s	K4s	K3s	K2s
AQ	KQ	QQ	QJs	QTs	Q9s	Q8s	Q7s	Q6s	Q5s	Q4s	Q3s	Q2s
AJ	KJ	QJ	JJ	JTs	J9s	J8s	J7s	J6s	J5s	J4s	J3s	J2s
AT	KT	QT	JT	TT	T9s	T8s	T7s	T6s	T5s	T4s	T3s	T2s
A9	K9	Q9	J9	T9	99	98s	97s	96s	95s	94s	93s	92s
A8	K8	Q8	J8	T8	98	88	87s	86s	85s	84s	83s	82s
A7	K7	Q7	J7	T7	97	87	77	76s	75s	74s	73s	72s
A6	K6	Q6	J6	T6	96	86	76	66	65s	64s	63s	62s
A5	K5	Q5	J5	T5	95	85	75	65	55	54s	53s	52s
4A	K4	Q4	J4	T4	94	84	74	64	54	44	43s	42s
A3	K3	Q3	J3	T3	93	83	73	63	53	43	33	32s
A2	K2	Q2	J2	T2	92	82	72	62	52	42	32	22





This hand range is an estimate of course, but it gives us something to work with.

The Hero here raised \$20, but a larger raise would have been even better. My default bet sizing, when I am the first raiser, is about three to five big blinds plus what is already in the pot, so I would have made it \$30 (\$15 plus the value of the current pot: the Big Blind, the limper's money, plus my call). I almost always want my opponents to have to think about calling my raise, which is why I would have raised bigger. The actual raise of \$20 was near the amount where the button calls with 100% of his hands. I want to put opponents to hard decisions because that is where they make mistakes.

	Pot: \$45	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Small Blind)	Check/???		\$465
Villain (Button)	\$25		Covers









Hero has the best no pair hand. He also has backdoor Spades and backdoor Broadway. Hero opts to try for a free card, feeling he has too much equity to bluff with at this point. I would not argue against a continuation bet, but I think checking is also fine.

The Villain does not offer a free card and makes a weak bet at it. With the board being reasonably coordinated, a stronger hand wants to protect against the draws. Hero further limits the Villain's range. He believes Villain has either a weak King, a flush draw or a strong hand like a set.

	Percentage of Villain's range that hits: 25%		
	Hand	Percentage of original range	Percentage of hits
  	Flush draw	3%	10%
	Weak King	17%	65%
	Strong King	0%	0%
	Sets/Two Pair	6%	25%

When putting the Villain on a range, we also need to decide how often he will bluff with air. No amount of math will tell you that, you just guess. It would be unusual for a Villain to limp-call then bet out when checked to here with air, so I am not giving him much air in his range, but there is always some. Doing this at the table, I just nudge my result at the end a little to account for air.










Hero believes that with his tricky image a check-raise would represent a made hand like AK. Hero thinks he can push the Villain off of weak Kings and air. A weak King is about twice as likely here as anything else. If Hero believes he folds out most of the weak Kings with a check-raise then this is immediately profitable. Think of it this way: two times he will win the \$70 in the middle, and once he will lose \$90. This is a tidy little profit plus he does not always lose when he is called. Notice also that he is carrying his read from pre-flop over to explicitly remove strong Kings from the range. Hand reading is a multi-street process.

  	Pot: \$45	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Small Blind)	Check/\$90	 	\$440
Villain (Button) 	\$25/Call	 	Covers

With this flat call, Hero now further limits the Villain's hand range to a flush draw. Why? Because on this wet of a board, a set or two pair is likely to try and protect his hand.

If everyone was all-in on the flop, a flush draw is basically a coin flip against Hero's hand. However, there is still a lot of money back and Villain is going to have to pay a very high price to draw to this flush on the turn

when his equity will drop to about 35%. Unless he is very unlucky and Villain pairs up, Hero will know he is ahead on any non-flush card.

   	Pot: \$225	Range:	Starting Stack:
Hero (Small Blind)	Shove	 	\$350
Villain (Button) 	Call	 	Covers

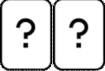
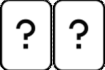

Unless Hero is having a very bad day, the Three did not help Villain and Hero is still ahead with Ace high. Hero considers making a standard bet of \$150. Villain would be correct to fold the flush draw against the likely top pair for that price since Hero is never paying him off when he hits the flush. Instead, Hero decides that Villain is feeling very tilted and is tired of being bluffed. A shove might be perceived as a big bluff and get the Villain to call on an emotional basis rather than a mathematical one. If he is willing to incorrectly call with a flush draw for \$150, he might be willing to do the same for his entire stack.

Villain does indeed make the call. Hero tables his hand and is ahead of 78 suited in Spades. This is a terrible call by the Villain. Players will often feel like they can call someone down if they know the other player is bluffing. However, they fail to realize that they still need to be able to beat that bluff to correctly call. The river brings no help and the Ace high gets maximum value.

If Villain was willing to tilt off his stack this time, was the original check-raise right? It was premised on folding out a weak top pair. I think it was. A tilted guy can gamble incorrectly with a flush draw in a desperate attempt to get even but fold with a bad kicker in the same mental state.



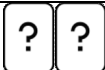

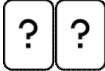



After writing up the above hand, I had the good fortune to play a similar one the next session. With good post flop skills, you can make the best of a bad situation. I entered this hand very light, simply as a button steal. Just picking up loose cash from limpers can be a profitable hobby while you are waiting for true value hands. I got caught doing this with a dreadful little piece of suited garbage, yet won a nice pot with a dominated flush draw.

\$2-\$5 Mohegan Sun	Image:	Action:	Hand:	Starting Stack:
MP2	Unknown	Call/Call		\$535
Hijack	Unknown	Call/Call		Covers
Button	Hero	\$35		\$485

This is a pure button steal. There is a big difference between limping behind with garbage on the button and raising with it. These Villains are put to the test immediately. Whenever we raise, we want to have fold equity. If the Villains are going to call without thinking, then we are really just bloating the pot up. That is rarely our goal. Our call puts \$22 in the pot, so a raise to \$25 would be a pot sized bet. However, in this game we are almost always getting one or two callers with that bet, so we like to make it \$35 or \$40 here. We are making that raise with AA, KQ, 9Ts also. It is really hard to put us on a range, and this makes it a tough decision for the opponents. Calling a raise to \$20 would be an easy decision. We don't want them to have easy decisions.

This was not the outcome we were looking for, but we still have cards, position and initiative. That is not nothing. On most flops we will consider a one barrel bluff here but rarely more than that. We hit this flop pretty well, so we have more options.

		Pot: \$112	Range:	Starting Stack:
Unknown (MP2)		\$40		\$500
Unknown (Hijack)		Call		Covers
Hero (Button)		???		\$450

Let us do some hand reading here. What does this donk bet likely mean? I like to try and think like the Villain. Even if his thinking is flawed, he has a reason for this bet. What is it? It is a very small bet. The Villain is very likely trying to protect his hand against the flush draw. He believes he is ahead, so he should bet to charge the draws. He does not love his hand, so he does not want to commit much money. I think the bet means he has

a King, but he is not really that proud of it. He does not strike me as the type to donk-lead into a draw.

What about the second Villain who just calls? I think that is a flush draw and likely a better one than mine. If he had a strong made hand, he is going to raise here because of the flush draw. He also might have a weak pair. Either way, this is a limiting call. His hand cannot be that strong if he just calls.

We have a pair that is behind top pair and a dominated flush draw. What should we do? Raise for value!

Going with these reads, now the hand looks like this:

	<b>Pot: \$112</b>	<b>Range:</b>	<b>Starting Stack:</b>
Unknown (MP2)	\$40/???		\$500
Unknown (Hijack)	Call		Covers
Hero (Button)	\$150		\$450

Am I crazy; do I hate my chips? No. The donk bettor does not like his hand very much. We believe this because of the bet sizing tell in the donk bet. We very likely fold him out with this kind of aggression.

The second player has a better flush draw, but we have two of his outs.





	<b>Hand</b>	<b>Equity on flop</b>	<b>Equity on non-flush turn</b>
		52% vs. 48%	70% vs. 30%
		60% vs. 40%	77% vs. 23%
		97% vs. 3%	100% vs. 0%

It is unclear which flush scenario we are in, but we can accomplish two goals with one raise. We can semi-bluff the better hand out and get value for our middle pair versus the draw.




What about the bet sizing? It is an awkward stack size for this. With our call, there is about \$230 in the pot and we have \$410 back. We are very likely coin flipping on the flop. If we make a pot sized bet, we are basically



pot committed even if the flush draw comes in on the turn. A raise to \$150 is enough to have fold equity on both the flop and turn.

	Pot: \$452	Range:	Starting Stack:
Unknown (MP2)	\$40/Fold		\$500
Unknown (Hijack)	Call/Call		Covers
Hero (Button)	\$150		\$450

We got what we wanted here, now we hope for a brick and shove for value. If we are wrong about the remaining Villain having a flush draw, then the shove will be a semi-bluff against what is presumably a weak made hand. It is hard to be wrong here.

	Pot: \$452	Range:	Starting Stack:
Unknown (Hijack)	Check/Fold		Covers
Hero (Button)	Shove		\$300

Getting 2.5:1 on his money here, he would be right to call with ATs in Diamonds versus this specific hand. However, he has no way of knowing his pair outs are good. He likely is just counting his nine expected flush outs and folds.