

SB versus BB

The recommendations above covered opening requirements from the four non-blind positions as well as three-betting guidelines in position and from the blinds, but did not cover the situation where everyone folds to the small blind. The main reason for this is that blind versus blind play is so opponent-dependent that default recommendations would be more misleading than useful. Although the SB versus BB scenario doesn't happen too often in typical 6-max games (~2.5% of the time when there are 5-6 players at the table), it is an important subject because many players are very exploitable in this situation. It is game theoretically correct for two equally-matched players to be quite loose blind versus blind. Each has a claim to some of the dead money they have put in the pot. By folding to the SB, the other players at the table have turned the hand from a net negative for both blinds into a net positive – relinquishing that opportunity too easily is a mistake.

The starting point for creating a small blind strategy is to understand that a pot-sized preflop steal risks 2.5bb to win 1.5bb, and therefore must be successful 62.5% of the time to show an immediate profit. There are a wide range of typical vpip/3bet frequencies for the BB facing a SB open, with most between 35/5 and 60/20. Very few opponents are tight enough in this situation that raising their BB shows an immediate profit, but there are some who are.

Against opponents who fold only 40%-50% of the time preflop and play fit-or-fold postflop, it will usually be fairly easy to show a profit with a strategy of raising any reasonable hand and continuation betting most flops. Even if we fold to every three-bet against an opponent who folds 40%, calls 40%, and raises 20%, we only need an ~35% equity share in the 6bb pot created when he calls to show a profit on the raise. Open-folding the Tier 6 hands and having a reasonable barreling strategy is enough of a buffer for the ex-showdown equity tax of playing out of position with a lot of marginal hands.

It should be clear enough that raising 75%+ in the SB is itself a strategy that is easily exploitable by a competent and aggressive BB. The first step would be to rarely fold. Getting 2:1 with positional advantage against a near-random range there is no reason to fold all but the worst hands. Against someone whose postflop strategy is as unsophisticated as continuation betting and shutting down to further aggression without a strong hand, the BB can literally call or reraise 100% of hands, float or raise every flop, and show a profit. Even someone who steals with the top half of hands will miss too many flops.

The main weapon the SB has against frequent (15%-25%) three-betting is to four-bet a lot (~10%), call and check-raise flops a lot when he doesn't 4-bet, and generally turn the blind battle into a variance-fest where as much money goes in early in the hand as possible. Doing this without spewing is not easy, but it is better than the alternative of raise/folding a lot or calling and check-folding. In order to facilitate such a strategy, the SB facing an aggressive three-bettor in the BB should focus on only opening mediocre hands if they hit a lot of flops hard enough to semi-bluff light in three-bet pots. The BB can counter this by calling more and playing three-street pots and/or three-betting to a smaller size (5bb-6bb) and creating awkward SPRs. For further discussion of the difficulties of playing an SPR of 7-8 OOP see the section "Unorthodox Raise Sizing."

Limping and Limpers

Facing Limpers IP: The 60/20/20 Rule

We will often find ourselves in the CO or BN with one or two loose open-limpers and a hand that is good enough to open in an unopened pot. NLHE players are used to seeing open limps as a weakness that is easy to punish, and isolation-raising over a typical limper (or two) in NLHE with nearly the entire open-raising range is fairly standard. Two factors make this strategy problematic in PLO. One, multi-way pots are harder to steal in PLO than NLHE. Two, raising a single limper is a lot less likely to result in a heads-up pot in PLO than NLHE. An open-limp at a 6-max table is usually an exploitable weakness and position does give us significant automatic advantages in all of the situations that can result from raising a limper, but there are some hands that have a much harder time using those advantages.

There are two groups of hands in particular which should be open-raised CO or BN but not isolation-raised. One, the bottom end of the trashy positionally-playable hands – disconnected doublesuited hands like Q842, single-suited