

Bonus Hand 1: JB Flops a Monster

It's Zoom NL50 and JB is UTG with 7♦7♠. MP, on whom he has absolutely no reads or stats, calls, and they go HU to the flop 100bb deep.

The flop is 7♣T♠T♣. JB bets \$2 into \$3.75 and MP calls.

The turn is A♠, and both players check.

The river is Q♥. JB bets \$3.25 into \$7.75, MP raises to \$13.50 and JB moves all in. MP calls.

TT: There's a similar hand in the book. Did you read it? I would like to see an in-depth range analysis for this hand. What happens to Villain's range as the hand progresses? What does it look like with your bet-check-bet approach? Can you evaluate your other options (e.g. bet-bet-bet or bet-check-check)?

JB: Preflop, I suppose he has good suited broadways, big aces, pairs, some suited connectors and some suited aces. I've sucked all the life out of the flop, and I'm not thinking about balance here, although if I was I'd probably bet on the small side as it's hard to hit a paired flop. I'm really targeting flush draws and 89s, and hoping to get paid off if he hits. I think there's a limit to how much I can extract from him if he has some mid pair or overpair, which is his most likely range for calling on the flop. If I'm lucky, he may peel with overcards and try to take it away on the turn. If he has a T, I'm probably getting his stack whatever I do. When the Ace hits, it improves my range much more than his, so I don't really see the point in betting. I don't want to fold out his flush and straight draws. After he checks back, he most likely has some mid pair, which may or may not bet the river, so I go for a thin value bet on the river. When he raises, it's actually hard to see what I beat that can call my shove, but hey, I have a full house, I've underrepresented my hand and it's NL50, so he'll probably call a raise. I can see an argument for just calling, but he might slowplay Tx or AK, so I'm happy to go for max value.

TT: Hmmmm. It may take me a while to analyse this hand.

You say that Villain is an unknown. The fact that you have no information on him leads me to believe that the odds are in favour of him not being an experienced regular on this limit, since you know most of them. He has a 180bb stack, which at least shows that you are not playing against a short- or midstack strategy player.

You talked about preflop already. I would say a TAG has about a 10% calling range here, consisting of: 22+, ATs+, KJs+, QJs, JTs, AQo+. A random fish can have pretty much anything.

As played by JB

On the flop, JB bets \$2 into \$3.75. Before I discuss calling ranges, you need to be aware of what such a small flop bet does to Villain's range. There is a significant difference between a ½ pot cbet and a ¾ pot cbet. A-highs, K-highs, gutshots and the lowest pocket pairs might call the ½ pot bet, but fold or (semi-)bluff raise against a bigger bet. It's not just Villain who plays his range; to a large extent it's your bet size that influences how that range is going to play. *I'm really targeting flush draws and 89s*

and hoping to get paid off if he hits. I think there's a limit to how much I can extract from him if he has some mid pair or overpair, which is his most likely range for calling on the flop. You say that you are mostly targeting FDs, OESDs and pocket pairs, but what you actually do is target a much wider range by betting half pot. If you'd said that you wanted to target the widest possible range to let him float the flop, your bet size would be consistent with your statement. However, if you are targeting the range that you want to target, there is no need to bet so small. Bet $\frac{3}{4}$ pot and really target those hands that won't fold to one bet. 89 or 55, the weakest hands of the range you say you are targeting, won't fold anyway and neither will the other part of his range.

Before you even bet the flop, you need to have a plan. For the hands you say you want to target, a good plan is to bet big on the flop and small on blank turns. No hand you mentioned will fold the flop, which is the reason for the bigger flop bet, but on a blank turn Villain might fold this range to a bigger bet. By betting small you allow him to (i) bluff raise and (ii) call light IP in order to draw to a second best hand and pay you off. In most cases I would also bet small on the river without even thinking about the cards, simply because a big-small-small approach on this texture with these assumptions maximizes your EV against weak pairs, which take the odds and call, as well as hands with which he wants to bluff if he reads your sizing as weak.

JB decided to bet small on the flop and was called. The turn is a scare card, and one he would bluff frequently. I think that betting small again is a solid option. You lose a little bit of value against A-highs with a small turn bet, but maximize it against lower pairs and also increase the chances of getting bluff raised by his gutshot floats like J9. Spade floats can easily call too, drawing to a second best hand. The fact, that you lose a little value on the turn against A-high is not so critical because, after a small-small approach on flop and turn, you should bet big on the river because the weak part of his range cannot really bluff catch now. After the line you took, you too often have a hand that beats him, and he mostly folds hands like 88. FDs and OESDs that didn't bluff before probably won't bluff the river either, so you also don't have to attack those hands. Check/calling the river is also a viable option, because Ax bets anyway and busted draws might bet too. You don't block Ax combos, which is great, so you can target all the Ax hands that floated the flop and called the turn, which makes up a decent part of Villain's range, so betting the river bigger after betting small on the flop and turn is a solid idea.

JB had a different plan, with which I disagree. He went small-check-small. I would even argue that on the turn he didn't have a clear plan for what to do after he checked against different bet sizes from MP.

JB: I did have a plan....I was going to raise. How would his bet size influence my actions?

EC: Think of how your range looks - mostly a middle pair, right? If he bets big, he is trying either to look scary with a bluff or to maximize the money that gets into the pot because he has a strong hand. In both cases, calling is best because you stack his monster, but want to keep any possible air in his range as well. If he bets small, he is either going for a cheap bluff, in which case you shouldn't raise, or trying to induce a raise, in which case he has a monster that will pay you off later. The only difference it makes is that a smaller bet can also be more of a thin value bet that wants to get a free showdown. If you read the rest of TT's comments you will see that he didn't mention a bet - check/raise - shove line for this hand. That is because what you do by betting is make his range have fewer bluffs, followed by a check

assuming he actually floats the flop sometimes and then bets his floats and value hands, followed by a raise that makes his floats fold. That sort of line will only get it in against monsters. You already mentioned that you are trying to maximize value against less than monster hands because those stack off anyway. There's also a tendency around NL50/NL100 to consider a turn and river check-raise stronger than a flop check-raise, which is a correct assumption, but means that you shouldn't try to look weak by check-raising those streets too often. If you know he is a fish, I would not mind a bet flop, check-shove turn line, but even then it's probably not the best option since there are not enough scare cards to warrant getting it in as soon as possible against his top pair combos, and a lot of those cards that scare a one pair hand improve his range.

After MP checks back, you can assume that he doesn't have Tx. You are looking at 22-99, K-high FDs, and sometimes Ax being a bit deceptive and pot controlling. Against this range, I don't see any reason to bet the river. It's really obvious to him that you hit your A on the turn and didn't want to force him to fold. It's such a good scare card, why would you not bet the turn but bet the river? Villain can easily fold weak pairs and K highs, and call with Ax, so you should not bet, check again (Remember the hand from the book? You said "checking twice - I didn't know that was an option") and go for a check-raise, expecting Villain to check back pairs and K-high but bet busted draws and especially Ax. This line is quite goofy in Villain's eyes so you will mostly see Ax tank-call a check-raise.

How TT would approach the hand

Given the limited information and the flop texture, I see three lines worth taking. I will try to briefly cover all of them.

1. check/raise - bet - bet AI

This line targets pairs that bet the flop when checked to (most of them I'd assume) and then feel that they're getting bluffed, not believing and calling one or more streets. Of course, it also gets the money in against Tx, but you don't need to focus on those combos too much as you always get it in anyway. This line is especially powerful against weaker players, since they have a hard time letting go of pocket pairs on that board, especially 88+. Against a pocket pair-heavy range, this turn card is bad, because it gives you quite some fold equity. I would bet the turn small and mostly focus on Ax of clubs and the occasional JJ that still doesn't want to fold. At that point you lose your customers with 22-66 every time and quite often 88, 99 too. You don't gain much by checking the turn and betting the river. It's too obvious that you don't want to scare those pocket pairs away on the turn and value bet the river. In any case, I would shove the river, expecting to get called by Ax (mostly in clubs) or Tx. That's fine. Checking doesn't accomplish much, since Villain more often has Ax than busted clubs which want to bluff.

2. bet - bet - bet

The turn is a good bluff card and, since you would bluff here with all FDs, OESDs and gutshots, you should value bet as well. 99 might still call one bet, all Broadway spade combos that floated the flop will call, and so will Ax. You only fold out the small pocket pairs and floats that now

don't dare to bluff raise. On the river, you just bet again and don't expect Ax to fold because both FDs are busted. I would not fold against a raise ever, especially if you bet on the smaller side. Villain can very well put you on a value bet with AJ, AQ or AK, and try to raise you off it by repping a full house with his busted OESD or FD, or even turn a made hand into a bluff, for example with 99 or JJ.

3. check/call - check/call - check/raise AI

JB said that he had no reads and no hands on Villain. If he had played a few hands with this opponent, he could have picked up on one hand he played before or one tendency; maybe not a proper read, but he could have the feeling that MP is slightly aggressive, when he should consider this line. By checking the flop, you immediately reverse your range and put MP into the driver's seat. I would argue that almost all hands would bet, especially pocket pairs for protection and all draws, even weak ones, for fold equity. A-high will check back regularly, especially AQ and AJ, which have decent enough showdown value. If you face a bet, you should call, representing mostly A high or a medium pair. I would continue representing a weak range all the way to the river and check/raise AI. Your range looks face up after being PFR from UTG and then check/calling two streets postflop. Many aggressive players would just bet-bet-(overbet) shove as a default (TwiceT in 2009 would have done exactly that).

I can already picture JB jumping out of his chair and asking "But what if MP checks back the flop? You didn't think about that! Ha!" I did sir. There's an easy answer Professor. Our range assessment still holds true, but it shifts to Ax hands. Those would call preflop and often not bet on the flop. Since the turn is an A, you don't need to bet as Villain will bet for you. You can then decide whether to check/raise (I like it because it's unexpected and players don't ever fold Ax here) or check/call and represent a weak Ax. Again, I see JB pointing his finger and saying "What if Villain doesn't bet the turn? You didn't consider that option! Hah!" Of course I did sir. Now you have to think about what it means if Villain checks back two streets with our range assumptions and consider what your range looks like to him. You clearly look super weak, and 99 is probably our strongest hand here in his eyes. Villain still has low pocket pairs, which might call a very small bet. He might still have Ax if he thinks he can only get one street of value and delayed until the river to either spike a bluff or just value bet himself. I would therefore check/raise the river big and represent a bluff and "I know you know I have nothing, but I know you have nothing as well so I will bluff you and you can't call". JB will probably now ask "What if I check/call on the flop and Villain checks back the turn?" The A is an interesting card. You could very well have strong A-high and check/call the flop. However, what is the point of betting the river? You would represent AK or AQ way too well. I would rather continue to represent 7x or 88, so I would check the river, knowing that Villain will check back 99, but also knowing that you won't get him to call a bet given the previous action and the board texture. Often enough Villain will bet A-high on the flop and, pleased to have hit an A on the turn, snap check back. Once you check again on the river, he will most likely bet and you can make a funky check/raise that will confuse the shit out of him, mostly resulting in him calling just to see what's up.

JB: So many pictures of me, and so many assumptions. I don't really do jumping out of my chair or pointing my finger....I tend to emote with my eyebrows.

There is merit to all of these lines. Which one to take depends on your opponent. Whenever you have no stats, you need to make use of all the other information out there. You should still have an idea of how the game plays on this specific limit at this specific poker room. Be aware of how the bet sizing of you and Villain massively influences ranges and your decisions. You will mostly play against opponents that you have some notes and stats on. That's why it's important not only to consider all your options but also to find the best line against each opponent while not neglecting to have balanced ranges in most spots.

Postscript

...and Villain shows down A♣7♠.

TT: Of course, against such a bad player it doesn't matter what you do, the money will always fly in because he has three pair!