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→ very apparent that I was pushing far too wide in some spots and playing too tight in others.

The most revelatory piece of advice came in the hand reviews, though. Perez imported my hand histories into Universal Hand Replayer (www.universal-replayer.net) and went through them at the end of the first session. It quickly became apparent that my biggest leak was missing out on lots of stealing opportunities and failing to pick up pots when no one was showing any aggression. In six-max games, as Perez made clear, you can't afford to do that. One brilliant tip he gave me was not to fold my small blind in an unraised pot, even if I have a hand like J-4 or 6-8o. His argument is that you should simply limp in, as you are getting odds of 3-to-1, and then, presuming the big blind has checked preflop, take a min-bet stab at the pot. I was immediately amazed at how effective the strategy is. Before long I was taking down lots more pots and keeping my stack in good shape for the later stages.

SECOND SESSION

I was already aware of ICM (the Independent Chip Model) and how the number of chips you have can be measured in terms of your \$ equity in the

tournament, but the second lesson was still another eye-opener, particularly in how ICM affects your bubble decision-making. Through a series of big-stack, medium-stack and short-stack scenarios, Perez demonstrated how your strategy should change significantly based on which situation you are in. It was incredible to see that in some medium-stack situations when shoved on by the big stack, folding Q-Q and A-K is easy in terms of your tournament equity, and how when you're the big stack you can often profitably shove any two cards into the short stack virtually every time.

We finished up with another hand history review session where Perez quickly noticed that my play had improved drastically from our first session. I was now making far better shoves and folds, was stealing pots when no one had anything and was opening with a wider range in late position. I was also encouraged to think and play creatively in some spots, and when flopping hands like big draws, make sure I get the last bet in. This means you can win the pot in two ways – either by getting a better hand to fold a substantial amount of the time, or by hitting one of your many outs when you get called.

FINISHING TOUCHES

If you're serious about sit-and-go play you can have a tailored training session, too, where you explore niche points of the game. In my case I wanted to know how to set up and use a HUD (heads-up display), and make use of programs like Table Ninja (an intuitive way of controlling the action via hotkeys and the mouse) and SitNGo Wizard (which you can use to analyse your sessions after and see where you made right or wrong shoves and folds). These were all covered in my third training session, where he also reiterated my major leaks, and how I should continue to pay attention to them in order to profit.

Of course, the proof as they say is in the pudding, and although the sample size of games played since my training is very small I can say without doubt that the way I think about the game, my decision-making and knowledge of how to exploit other players have all improved enormously. PP

FIVE THINGS I'VE LEARNT

1

STEAL BIG, STEAL LITTLE

In six-max SNGs chip-stealing is essential. Picking up pots when no one is showing strength, and raising unopened pots from the cutoff and button with a wide range is mandatory.

2

PLAY BIG HANDS FAST

When you flop big hands like two pair or a set you should make sizeable bets and avoid slow-playing. In sit-and-gos players call and stack off light, so you should create the best possible chance of winning a big pot by building it straight away.

3

TIGHT IS RIGHT

You should be very reluctant to call all-in on the bubble of a sit-and-go, as you often need to be a very big favourite to justify it. If you're the big stack it's obviously easier, but when you're the middle stack and you stand to go out if you lose to the big stack, you might only be able to call profitably with K-K and A-A.

4

TABLE SELECTION

Don't blindly register for any sit-and-go that's about to start. Just as you'd table-select in a cash game it's vital you don't play lots of games with other good regulars over whom you will have very little or no edge. Use SharkScope and your notes to flag up players to avoid.

5

ANALYSE YOUR PLAY

In order to get an idea of how right or wrong a push, call or fold is at the endgame stage, it's essential to buy a program like SitNGo Wizard, which will crunch the numbers from your games and tell you whether you made a +EV or -EV play.



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SIX-MAX COACHING

FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN LEARN FROM THE BEST...

→ Marcos Perez and AI McClenahan are two of the best mid to high stakes six-max online sit-and-go players in the world. Perez – PezRez on PokerStars – is currently ranked number one in six-max sit-and-gos for stakes ranging from \$36-\$100 on SharkScope.

Perez and McClenahan offer standard coaching for \$150 per hour, or discounted coaching packages for \$595 or \$995, which include several long sessions covering all aspects of six-max SNG play.

You could, though, apply for a staking arrangement, on a 'no-win, no-fee' basis where you will receive money to play with and pay a certain amount of your profits back to them.

● For more information and to learn more about the pros check out their site: www.6maxcoaching.com or email 6maxcoaching@gmail.com

NOTES FROM THE COACH

AFTER THREE TRAINING SESSIONS, MARCOS PEREZ GIVES HIS ANALYSIS ON MARK'S PLAY...

→ Mark told me it had been a while since he'd played sit-and-gos, so some major adjustments would be required to translate his successful cash game style into winning SNG play. This soon became apparent in our first coaching session – he seemed to have no interest in stealing any pots! As I explained to him straight away, sit-and-gos, particularly short-handed ones, are not so much survival contests as stealing contests. A great sit-and-go player tenaciously plugs away at every +EV bluffing spot, but Mark seemed determined to fold his way to victory. Perfectly serviceable hands like 9♥-6♥ and Q♠-9♠ flew into the muck from the small blind – even with deep stacks and getting 5-to-1 pot odds. It's also worth remembering that sit-and-gos feature much weaker players than cash games, so it pays to tangle with the fish while their chips are still there for the taking.

Having said that, in the early stages of a SNG, when you're not in the blinds, you should still be playing a conservative game. It's all about getting value from your big hands, rather than bluffing. I watched with dismay as Mark flopped a set and slow-played it against a big fish. This may be the right play in a cash game, but in SNGs players will call off their stack with a weak top pair. So you need to build a pot early that lets you slide in the rest of your fishy foe's stack on the river, giving him pot odds that he just can't resist.

IMPROVEMENTS

In the middle stages, it's important to seize on any weakness shown by your opponents to take low-risk bluffing opportunities and accumulate chips. In one hand, with blinds of 50/100, Mark checked behind the small blind's limp with 6-4 offsuit. So far, so standard. But when his opponent checked a flop of A♥-Q♠-8♦, Mark really had to bet. Risking 100 to win 200, he only needs to win a third of the time to make this bet profitable. Meanwhile his opponent is very unlikely to have an Ace in an unraised pot, and with few draws and no overcards to call with, he will fold well over half the time. Mark checked behind, but after an earful from me, he was soon min-betting with abandon and picking up a lot of pots.

Come the late stages, plays that win chips and plays that win money diverge drastically. You need to be willing to shove very loose, particularly against one player, but you must call other people's shoves very tightly, especially if you are calling all-in. At first, Mark was making some understandable but incorrect calls with hands like A♦-5♦ – calls that would be correct in a cash game situation but are patently wrong here. But after the lesson on ICM and bubble play, this leak was plugged, and Mark started playing appropriately with all stack sizes.

In our last session Mark was a transformed player. He is now maximising value for his big hands by betting out and getting paid off. He is robbing his tight opponents with small raises from late position. And he is happily shoving any two cards in the right bubble spots. I think he's arrived.