





# SEVEN DAYS IN HEAVEN

A•P•R•I•L						
FRI	SAT	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU
			BY KEN ADAMS			

## My Trip to the World Series of Poker

If you play poker for a living, this article is not for you. But if you work every day in an office, and by Thursday afternoon each week, your mind starts wandering to Friday night's poker game, then you and I are spiritual brothers and sisters, and I dedicate my story to you.

You have read David Sklansky and Mason Malmuth. You have read Doyle Brunson. You have bought at least one poker program that enables you to practice your hold'em skills on your home computer. You have tried your luck in a few tournaments; you've read Tom McEvoy's book and fantasized about winning a \$100 satellite and going all the way in the *World Series*.

This year, you just happen to have business on the West Coast the week before the \$10,000 *World Series* championship event. So you take a week off from work, and after you finish your West Coast business, you head for Las Vegas to try your luck in the satellites and live action games.

You fly in after work on Friday and arrive at your hotel around 8 p.m. You haven't had much rest, you've been working your tail off all week, and you've been up since 6:30 a.m., but you can't wait to play. So you head for a \$10-\$20 hold'em table at the Mirage. Eventually you get a seat. The guy in the No. 4 seat is wearing headphones (we'll call him "Headset"). The woman in the No. 6 seat has one of those nifty fans to blow away the smoke. Next to "Fan Lady" is a guy wearing a ruffled tuxedo shirt that looks just like the one the dealer is wearing. Apparently dealers are allowed to prey on the tourists when they are off duty.

The locals are salivating. They've been waiting all afternoon for you to arrive. They know you have committed yourself to

playing "tight but aggressive," just like Sklansky and Malmuth teach. They also know you have the "aggressive" part down pretty well but haven't quite got the "tight" part yet.

You buy in for \$200. You see one or two flops during the first round and muck your hand when nothing hits the board that remotely resembles your cards. You are doing your best to get a line on Headset, Fan Lady, and Dealer, as well as the other assorted mix of tourists and locals. It doesn't take long to see that Headset is a rock. He plays one hand in the first two rounds, raises before the flop with wired queens to get heads up with the big blind, then mucks his queens when a king hits the board on the river. (You remember doing that once, when Earl was feeling so sorry for you one Friday night after beating on you like a drum that he showed you his K-3 offsuit after he bet out on the river.) Fan Lady is a total slug. She loves to slow-play big hands and never puts money in the pot unless she is sure she has the best hand. Dealer is extremely aggressive against the tourists, wary against Headset.

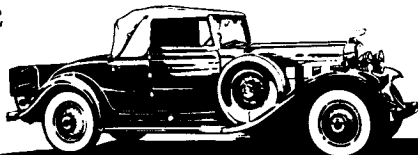
On the third round, you have two rags in the big blind. No one raises. Four players see the flop, which comes A-4-4. You've flopped a set with no kicker.

You check, another tourist bets his ace, and Fan Lady cold-calls, probably with an ace and a big kicker. Dealer folds, and you raise, hoping Fan Lady didn't play a suited A-4.

Tourist and Fan Lady call. The turn and river are blanks, and you take down your first pot. Headset is quick to compliment you — "Nice hand." He can't wait for you to play those rags again.

A few hands later, Headset raises before the flop. You have K-K. One player calls \$20 cold. You are in last position. You

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know you should either fold or reraise to shrink the field, but you are not looking to challenge Headset. He might well have aces, and you really don't want to give him the satisfaction of betting his hand for him. On the other hand, you have never mucked wired kings before the flop in your life. So you just call. The flop comes A-K-3, with two spades. Headset bets out, tourist calls, and you just call, fearing you may have the second best set. The turn and river are the nine and seven of hearts. Headset bets the turn and the river. Tourist folds on the river, and you call. Headset shows A-K. You scoop a reasonable pot, though half the size it could have been if you had bet more aggressively. Headset takes the long view and again says, "Nice hand," though the smile is gone. (He didn't mind when you beat someone else, but he didn't expect his own chips to end up in your stack.)

It starts to look as though you might be on a rush when you pick up wired jacks on the next deal. The pot is raised and reraised by the time it gets to you. You decide to play the rush, so you reraise. Headset caps it off, and five players see the flop for \$50 each—the first monster pot since you sat down. The flop comes 9-5-5, with two hearts. Headset bets out, and everyone calls. With \$290 in the pot, you are getting good enough odds to peel off a jack, so you call. The turn brings a black deuce — no apparent help to anyone. The small blind bets out, and Headset raises. Tourist and Dealer fold. You quickly calculate that the pot is offering you only 9-to-1 odds for your two-card draw, but you are feeling lucky, so you call. The small blind just calls. The river brings the jack of clubs! The small blind checks. Headset smiles (having put the small blind on a heart draw) and bets out. You raise, and Headset's smile melts into a snarl. The small blind folds, and Headset calls. You show your full house. He mutters something about "two \*!@%&\*! outs," grabs his remaining \$50 in chips, and cashes out. You can't believe it; you've been at the table for only an hour, and you've busted a pro!

On Saturday and Sunday, you play the \$100 satellite tournaments, hoping to win a seat in the championship event. The only distinction you achieve is getting knocked out of one satellite by Mike Alsaadi, a local professional who ends up

finishing fourth in the *World Series* four days later.

You hang out at the tournament for the next four days, hobnobbing with the world-class players you have been reading about in *The Card Player* for years, and watching with awe as they move stacks of \$100 bills across the table in the pot-limit and no-limit side games. You watch Johnny Chan and Hamid Dastmalchi lay down wired queens and wired kings, respectively, in the face of an all-in bet by Mike Alsaadi. When Alsaadi shows his wired aces, you wonder how these guys know with such amazing accuracy when their premium hands are beat. It's as though they have radar, operating on a frequency that you can't even hear.

Inspired by watching the champs play, you decide to move up to the \$20-\$40 game at Binions. By the time you realize that the table is screwed down a lot tighter than the \$10-\$20 tables at the Mirage, you have frittered away most of your \$500 buy-in on drawing hands that don't get there and positional bluffs that get called. Then you learn a lesson that you will not soon forget. With only \$150 left on the table, you are dealt wired kings in the small blind. The pot is raised in middle position and reraised in late position. You call, hoping a king will flop. The pot is reraised and capped. You call and pray. The flop comes K-Q-7 offsuit.

You bet out; the pot is raised and reraised. You call all in. The turn card is a blank. A big side pot develops, as the remaining two players raise one another twice on the turn and three times on the river. They show A-A and K-Q. You take down the main pot and vow never again to leave yourself without enough money on the table to capitalize on a monster hand. It cost you more than \$500 on that hand alone!

The next evening, you go back to the \$10-\$20 hold'em game at the Mirage, where you learn another lesson. An hour or two into the session, a new player sits down to your left. Before you can get a clear line on his play, you flop a queen-high open-ended straight draw. You call the opening bet, as does Newcomer on your left. The turn card is a blank. Same betting. The river card is an eight, giving you the nut straight. The original bettor checks, you bet, and Newcomer raises. You reraise and he reraises. After seven reraises (heads up), he has about \$100 left on the table; you have twice that much. But it seems obvious that you both have the same straight, so you just call. He shows a jack-high straight! You scoop a big pot and vow never again



Besides, you can't pass up the opportunity to go home and brag to the Friday night crowd about the time you beat Sklansky out of a pot.

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to quit betting the nuts until someone runs out of money. (Not a lesson you expect to be able to use again any time soon.)

The table breaks down at 5 a.m. Flush with your score at the \$10-\$20 table, you move over to the \$20-\$40 table. Only after you have stacked your chips in neat towers do you look across the table and realize that the player in the No. 10 seat is none other than David Sklansky. You consider leaving before you get hurt, but the combination of embarrassment, ego, and pride keeps you from beating a hasty retreat before the first shot is fired. Besides, you can't pass up the opportunity to go home and brag to the Friday night crowd about the time you beat Sklansky out of a pot. (That kind of thinking probably puts an extra thousand a week in David Sklansky's pocket.)

After an hour of playing as "tight but aggressive" as you know how, you find yourself with pocket sevens in late position. The pot is raised by another player who moved over with you from the \$10-\$20 game. (He is a local, a retired real-estate developer who is obviously a regular and seems to know everyone in the place. He has been playing very aggressively; if he doesn't fold before the flop, he raises.) You reraise, trying to get heads up with him. Sklansky calls \$40 cold. Your mind starts racing. What kind of hand could he have? You settle on big-suited connectors as a working hypothesis. Mr. Local does not reraise. Either he does not have a bigger pair than sevens, or he is as intimidated by Sklansky's call as you are. The flop comes Q-7-3, with two spades. Local bets out, and you gleefully put him on wired kings. You decide you don't want Sklansky's action, and there is no reason to slow-play your set, so you raise. Sklansky calls again! Maybe he has spades, you think; although the pot is not offering him very good odds for his draw, the implied odds may be enough. Local reraises, and you just call, waiting to see if a spade comes on the turn. It doesn't. Local bets out, and you raise again. Again Sklansky calls, making you very nervous. Local reraises, and this time you hit it again, secretly starting to believe that this is the hand you are going to be bragging about when you get home. To your delight, Sklansky calls again. It is hard to believe he is checking and calling all the way, a style of play that his book taught you is only for losers. The river is a spade, and now Sklansky bets out. Local curses and calls. You figure you



It is hard to believe he is checking and calling all the way, a style of play that his book taught you is only for losers.

can't beat them both, so you muck your hand. Local shows pocket queens, and Sklansky scoops a monster pot with his suited king of spades. You were beat all the way and never knew it.

Disheartened, you start thinking about calling it a night, but a few rounds later, you find yourself with pocket jacks in middle position. A player on your right, who is stuck and steaming, raises the pot. You just call, remembering how expensive it was when you flopped the second best set. Four players see the flop, which comes J-10-6 offsuit. Steamer bets out, and you raise to clear the field. It works, and you are heads up with Steamer, who reraises. You put him on an overpair and decide not to scare him off by reraising. The turn card is an eight, creating a spade draw and making a possible straight.

Steamer bets out. You raise to find out where he is and he reraises. You call, assuming he has made a straight and praying for the board to pair. The river card is another eight. Steamer bets out again. You raise. He reraises. You had not expected to use so soon the lesson you learned at the \$10-\$20 table. If he is going to raise your nut hand, all his chips are going into the pot. This time, there is no way he can have the same hand. You reckon that it is

impossible for him to have wired eights, given his earlier betting. After two more raises, you suffer a mental lapse. You say raise but put out only enough chips to call. He does not realize you mean to raise and triumphantly shows wired tens, for a worse full house. Embarrassed at having left him with chips on the table, you show your jacks. Sklansky cannot believe you didn't keep raising and asks if you seriously thought Steamer had wired eights. Unsure of which is worse, to admit misreading Steamer's hand or to admit screwing up the intended raise, you just smile and scoop the chips.

I could go on for hours, but it's time to get back to the office. To make a long story less long, I never did get to beat Sklansky out of a pot. But I had a great time, left town with a nice win, and vowed to return for the 1993 World Series. Next year, I know I can win one of those \$100 satellites. Maybe I'll even take another shot at Sklansky. ♦

*Editor's note: Ken Adams is an East Coast poker player who earns his living as a lawyer when he is not playing poker.*

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# When To Split a Pair With a Favorable Count: Part II

BY MARC SMITH

In this issue, we conclude our examination of the effects of a favorable count on our play by looking at how we should deal with small pairs in these circumstances.

To recap, here are the basic rules established before we considered card counting:

1. *Never* split fours, fives, or face cards.
2. *Always* split aces and eights.
3. Split deuces and threes against a four, five, six, or seven.
4. Split sixes and sevens against a deuce, three, four, five, six, or seven.
5. Split nines against everything except an ace, a seven, or a face card.

Each of the tables that follows has two sections. The first part shows how much we gain by making the correct percentage play when the count is zero, and the second part shows the figures for the same situations when the true count is +6. In each case, we bet \$10, and we receive each card combination 50 times with a zero count and 50 times with a favorable shoe.

We are assuming the same bet in each situation for purposes of comparison, but in reality, we should have increased our bet significantly if the true count has reached +6, and thus making the wrong play costs triple or quadruple the figures shown.

We begin by examining Rule No. 3.

YOU HAVE A PAIR OF DEUCES										
Dealer's card	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
Count = 0										
Hit	\$12						\$39	\$84	\$88	\$82
Split		\$2	\$15	\$33	\$33	\$17				
Count = +6										
Hit							\$27	\$126	\$81	\$51
Split	\$25	\$72	\$89	\$127	\$106	\$42				

As you can see from the table, with a zero count, it is marginally better to split deuces when the dealer has a three through a seven. Once the true count reaches +6 (or higher), the gains from splitting in these same circumstances increase, and it also becomes correct to split if the dealer has a deuce.

YOU HAVE A PAIR OF THREES										
Dealer's card	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
Count = 0										
Hit	\$24	\$7					\$21	\$51	\$77	\$68
Split			\$14	\$35	\$29	\$21				
Count = +6										
Hit						\$28	\$65	\$96	\$134	\$105
Split	\$7	\$51	\$90	\$109	\$78					

With a pair of threes, we should split against the dealer's four through seven with a zero count. With a favorable count, we can be more aggressive in splitting against the dealer's deuce and three, but we should now be conservative and simply hit when the dealer has a seven.

When we have sixes and sevens, Rule No. 4 also needs to be amended for a favorable count.

YOU HAVE A PAIR OF SIXES										
Dealer's card	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
Count = 0										
Hit						\$0	\$46	\$89	\$130	\$122
Split	\$2	\$18	\$37	\$61	\$77	\$0				
Count = +6										
Hit						\$46	\$115	\$175	\$202	\$162
Split	\$24	\$63	\$98	\$124	\$121					

With a pair of sixes, it is correct to split when the dealer has a small card (deuce through six), irrespective of the count, and to hit against the dealer's other cards (splitting against a seven with a

zero count is optional).

The major effect of the count on a pair of sixes is the price you pay for an error.

As you can see from the table, the profit from splitting against small cards is much higher with a favorable count, but so is the loss if you incorrectly split against a high card.

YOU HAVE A PAIR OF SEVENS										
Dealer's card	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	A
Count = 0										
Hit							\$3	\$39	\$53	\$64
Split	\$38	\$52	\$71	\$100	\$118	\$138				
Count = +6										
Hit								\$58	\$113	\$50
Split	\$70	\$109	\$145	\$176	\$193	\$217	\$11			

With a pair of sevens, we should split against a deuce through a seven with a zero count, and with the count favorable, we also should split against an eight. Again, the profit from splitting is significantly higher when the count is positive.

To recap, here are the new rules that should be adhered to when the true count is +6 (or higher):

1. *Never* split fours or fives.
  - 1a. Split face cards against a deuce, three, four, five, or six.
  2. *Always* split aces.
  - 2a. Split eights unless the dealer has a face card.
  3. Split deuces against a deuce, three, four, five, six, or seven.
  - 3a. Split threes against a deuce, three, four, five, or six.
  4. Split sixes against a deuce, three, four, five, or six.
  - 4a. Split sevens against a deuce, three, four, five, six, seven, or eight.
  5. Split nines unless the dealer has a face card.♦

## Blackjack Answers

BY ARNOLD "THE BISHOP" SNYDER

**Question:** Exactly what is meant by playing "hole cards" at blackjack? I recently overheard a player, whom I guessed to be very knowledgeable, state that he doesn't count cards anymore, he "plays hole cards." Is this some new strategy?

**Answer:** Playing hole cards means that a player is using information about the dealer's hole cards to make his strategy decisions. There have been numerous books published over the past few years that explain various legal and illegal means of doing this. A brief rundown:

Playing "warps" is a method of determining the dealer's hole card according to the direction of the bend in the card. In casinos where decks are infrequently changed, and dealers peek under tens, tens will begin to have an arch in the center. Stanford Wong's *Basic Blackjack* (Pi Yee Press, 1992) is the only book in print I know of that describes this strategy. An illegal method of playing warps is for the players to purposely warp certain cards in games where players handle their cards. The net effect is the same — the player will be able to predict the dealer's hole card.

Playing "tells" is a method of determining the dealer's hole card based on physical mannerisms the dealer subconsciously exhibits. This type of play is possible only in games where the dealer peeks under his tens, as the dealer must know the strength of his own