

Sklansky on Poker

by David Sklansky

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Extra Outs

When deciding whether to play a marginal hand for at least one more card in seven-card stud or hold'em, the good player's final decision may hinge on whether he has "extra outs." By extra outs I mean a small extra possibility of coming up with the best hand other than through the obvious route. For instance, a three-flush on fifth street in seven-card stud is almost never worth playing just on its own value. However, if you add this three-flush to a small pair, the extra 5 percent chance of making a flush combined with your chances of helping your pair may very well make it worth seeing sixth street.

Strangely enough, it seems to me that only very good or very bad players correctly value the strength of these extra outs. I understand this. The conscientious, good but not great player doesn't want to base his hope on a 20-to-1 shot when he is only getting 5-to-1 pot odds. Only a sucker does that. That's true of course. It frequently occurs, however, that this extra 20-to-1 chance, when added to your more obvious chances, can make an otherwise unplayable hand playable. It has a greater effect than you might think.

For instance, if your "main hand" is a 5-to-1 underdog to improve but you also have an 11-to-1 chance of making a different hand (as you might with both a three-card straight and flush draw), what do you think this would bring your chances down to? The easiest way to answer this question is by changing the odds to percentages. 5-to-1 is 1/6 which is 16 2/3%.

$$16.67 = (1/6) (100)$$

11-to-1 is 1/12, which is 8 1/3%.

$$8.33 = (1/12)(100)$$

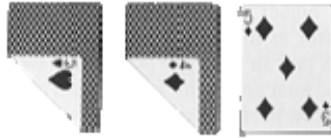
Adding up these two percentages gives us 25%.

$$25 = 16.67 + 8.33$$

Twenty five percent is 3-to-1! Your extra outs have cut your odds of improving from 5-to-1 to 3-to-1.

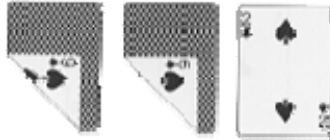
Typical situations where you may make use of this concept are:

1. **Third street - seven-card stud.** A hand like two 5s and a 10, three different suits should usually be folded. However, a hand like two 5s and a 4 with a two flush such as

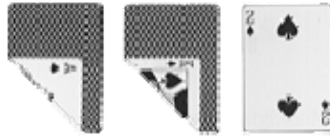


may be worth playing because of your extra chances for a straight or flush.

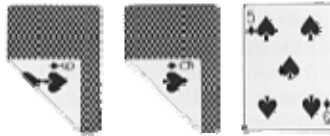
2. **Third street - seven-card stud.** A three flush like



might not be worth a play while



or



would be. In the first case, this is true because of your extra chances of pairing a high card; in the second case because of your chances of making a straight.

3. **The flop - hold'em.** A three flush on the flop combined with a small pair may be worth playing even if you are sure someone has a higher pair. It depends on your pot odds, of course. It is better in this case if your "kicker" is higher than your opponent's pair in case you both make two pair.
4. **The flop - hold'em.** A three-card flush combined with an inside straight draw preferably combined with an overcard. All of these chances may very well add up to an easy call. The other day, in fact, I called a bet and a raise cold with just such a hand because of the size of the pot. The pot had been raised before the flop and seven players called. I called with



The flop came



Someone bet and someone raised. I called cold which surprised many people. The possibility of catching a 4, an ace, or two running clubs," however -- any one of which I thought would probably win for me - made it worth it.

5. **Fifth street - seven-card stud.** A three-card flush along with a small pair may make it worth chasing an opponent's apparently bigger pair. It is even better if you have a three-card straight as well and better still if you have some kickers higher than his pair.
6. **Draw poker -- before the draw.** While the extra outs concept applies almost exclusively to seven-card stud and hold'em and not at all to lowball and razz, there is one application to draw poker, especially jacks-or-better. The best example arises when you are dealt a pair of jacks along with a four-card flush in early position. The jacks by themselves are not usually good enough to open. With the four flush, however, it's now worth it. You might steal the antes but now if you don't you can draw to the flush if you are called or raised.