

CHESS STRATEGIES FOR POKER

EVOLVE YOUR GAMER MIND

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Many poker players started with backgrounds in other areas of gaming, such as chess, backgammon, and the card game called Magic. Those who study multiple games acquire skills in theory and strategy that apply across the board (no pun intended). For example, when I began playing No Limit Hold'em, I recognized familiar patterns from my prior experience with tournament chess. Following are four strategic principles from chess theory that translate to the poker table.

Patience and Concentration

The first time I played chess with my dad, the entire match lasted less than ten minutes. I tried to use my queen as a battering ram to capture other pieces as quickly as possible. Of course, an advanced player knows chess takes patience and concentration, sometimes spanning hours for one match. Poker players who try to rapidly acquire all the chips learn the same lesson. The person who often prevails is the one disciplined enough to chip away at small pots, and wait for opportunities to win big pots.

See the Whole Board

The beginning chess player focuses only on his own plan and pieces. As he or she advances they begin to broaden their vision over the

whole board, including their opponent's plan and pieces. Similarly, experienced poker players do not limit their focus to their own cards. You must broaden your vision by considering the cards your opponents are holding, and what their game plan has been so far. In short, you need to see the whole table instead of just your own hand and chips.

Look Several Moves Ahead

The chess novice is only seeing one or two moves ahead. He does not look down the road to consider the long-term effect of his tactics or those of his opponent. A novice poker player is similar in relationship to a specific hand versus the entire game or tournament. Ask yourself what your opponent will do if you raise on the flop? What will you do if he re-raises? Before you act, think about your next move, the opponent's next move, and the consequences of each action.

Adjust your Play Based on the Changing Imbalances

The chess board is not a static environment; it is a fluid, dynamic battlefield. As the board changes, so do the imbalances. Perhaps you have fewer pieces than your opponent, but on the other hand, you have the momentum of an attack. If you are aware of the changing imbalances, you can take advantage of them by shifting gears. The same holds true in poker.

Certain imbalances cry out for you to adjust your play. When a new, aggressive player comes to the table, you may want to slow down and trap them. When you lose a big pot and find yourself on the short stack, you need to play fewer hands and pick your spots. In a tournament, any increase in the blinds or antes is a change that requires you to adjust your play. If you adjust well enough to make the final table, be aware of the most obvious change at the table – the reduction of players – and recognize it as an indicator to shift gears.

Some of the greatest wisdom I took from chess involved the process of improving my general gaming skills. The difference between being a chess master and a chess grandmaster depends on understanding subtle, but critical, changes on the board. This same skill of recognizing subtle but critical changes applies the poker table. Use the same strategic thinking in poker and, who knows, you may be able to apply it to the next big game you learn. ♣

*Find more poker insight from Michael Rome at his poker philosophy website www.romepoker.net. Kelli Mix is author of *The Game Day Poker Almanac Official Rules of Poker* and can be found at www.kellimix.com.*

