

# THE AMATEUR'S MIND

## THE SEDUCTION OF RHYTHM

BY MICHAEL ROME

**P**oker experts recommend playing in opposition to the table. If players are tight, be more aggressive; if they are aggressive, then tighten up. Although this is a simple and powerful technique, it can be difficult to put into practice.

We have all seen the situation in which a whole table is quickly checking or folding. This cycle can last for numerous hands, and when it does, alarms should be going off in our heads. We ought to start playing aggressively – regardless of our hole cards. Instead, we are lulled into the group dynamic, as though in some form of poker trance. Later we think back and realize a bet would have taken down the pot.

It is easy to underestimate the hypnotic sway of the status quo. As humans we are cultural lemmings who have a difficult time turning against the tide of the mob. Mark Twain observed that the price of independent thinking is loneliness. In poker, however, we are rewarded for opposing conformity (rewarded in chips, not popularity).

The key to success is remaining conscious while the rest of the table is in a collective rhythm. One method is to repeat all of the action in your head (blue shirt limps in under the gun, baseball cap raises on the button, etc.). This will make it easier to recognize the rhythms and changes in the group dynamics.

For example, a shift can occur when someone loses a large pot. It's as if the herd freezes for a moment after seeing a member taken down by a lion. Frequently, I will lead out the next hand with a bet, which often results in everyone folding. This tactic is especially effective if I am the one who just took down the wildebeest... I mean pot. *No one would bluff right after winning a large pot. It just isn't polite.*

I recently battled the seduction of rhythm at the World Poker Showdown in St. Maarten. It was the middle phase of the tournament, and the table consisted largely of conservative players. I was under the gun and decided to induce some action. Before the cards were dealt, I announced a blind raise three times the size of the big blind. I was a little surprised to see everyone fold.

Over the next couple of hours I repeated this technique ten times (the few times I was challenged by someone, the poor devil found I was lucky enough to be killing him). I was opposing the rhythm of the table, and probably got fewer callers than if I had looked at my cards. My competitors couldn't make themselves lower their starting card standards for calling or raising me. They certainly should have; after all, I was raising with a random hand.

In summary, here are some tips for dealing with the seduction of rhythm:

- Recognize the power of group mind at the table.
- Stay conscious by repeating all the action in your head.
- Act in opposition to take advantage of table cycles.
- Watch for quick changes in the collective dynamics.

So the next time the Sirens are seducing you into the shores of rhythm, resist them and become the large-stacked rebel.

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