

The Poker Sutra

Positional Strategies
for Texas Hold'em

By Michael Rome
& David Sassemann



The Kama Sutra is a manual on the art of lovemaking that was compiled in India during the second century. 'Kama' means pleasure which is experienced through the five senses, and 'Sutra' is a series of concise rules. The most well known chapter of the Kama Sutra is about sexual positions. In modern society, poker is a popular worldly pleasure, and to master the game it is essential to understand the strategy of positional play. So here are some excerpts from the Poker Sutra to help guide you on your journey.

Final Penetration: Acting from last position. Most positional strategy is based on the advantage of acting after your opponents; namely, acquiring more information before deciding to bet, raise, check or fold. For instance, if the players in front of you have shown weakness by checking, a bet may immediately win you the pot. As an alternative, you could just check for the purpose of seeing a free card or 'slow playing' a big hand. By acting last you have the superior position because you have greater knowledge upon which to make a decision.

Picking the Lotus: Stealing the blind. When the cards are first dealt, each player decides whether to fold or bet. If you are in late position, and everyone has folded around to you, it is not unusual to raise with any two decent cards. The bet should be large enough to put pressure on the blinds to fold. Even if the raise is called you will still have position on your opponent during the rest of the hand. So it is really a one-two punch and the players in the blinds have to take this into consideration when deciding whether or not to call you.

The Elephant Raises its Trunk: Large stack, last to act. Sometimes the chip leader has the dual tusks of position and ammunition. The irony is the more chips you have, the smaller your raises need to be. This is due to the implied threat of your large reserves. Nobody has to talk about the elephant in the poker room because everyone is aware of its presence. It's not necessary to stampede by making a pot-sized bet; half the size of the pot or less may be enough.

Swift Monkey: Betting out from first position. Over time players have become more aggressive in their approach to the game. As a result, the conventional wisdom of positional play can breakdown. For instance, being the first act might be a good counterintuitive tactic. Remember there is only a one in three chance of your opponent improving on the flop. Sometimes the first player to fire is going to take the pot.

Crouching Tiger, Flying Dragon: Check-raise. If you're the first player to act after the flop, and have a strong hand, you can check to try and induce a bet from your opponent. If they bet, you then make a significant raise. Don't use this strategy unless you are fairly certain your opponent will make the bet, otherwise they may outdraw you with the free card. It is also a powerful way to bluff, but of course, where there is potential gain there is equal risk.

Mongoose, Double Cobra: Raise, call, & reraise. When there is a bet ahead of you followed by a large raise, it is common to fold unless you are holding a monster... but there is another alternative. If you are holding a suited connector like 7-8 of hearts, consider a big reraise. You may get them to fold because of the fear you are holding aces or kings. If not, and they are holding the high pair, your best chance of getting lucky is with the suited connectors.

To get the ultimate enjoyment from poker it is important to become experienced in all the positions. Hopefully this will assist in your voyage to blissful communion with the poker gods.

Michael Rome can be found at his poker philosophy website: www.rome-poker.net. David Sassemann is a freelance poker writer who can be contacted at davidsassemann@yahoo.com. ♠