



THE WINNING PSYCHOLOGY

My hands had already curved themselves around the money on the polished brown of the table

by Sgt. L. F. Johnston

I PLAY scientific poker. A man has to, unless he wants to end up with a mortgage on his 782 equipment. In the game of science there are many factors whose consideration means a winning evening.

One does well to have day after tomorrow's weather forecast at his tongue's tip. He can lose nothing in knowing whether or not any of his opponents are suffering of last night's debauchery. If the host had a minor squabble with his spouse before gaining permission for the smokey session, that, too, can be of value.

To illustrate my system let me give you a description of a session in Argentina, Newfoundland. We sat at a long, polished table in a topside room. There was blowing snow outside; a lone Argentinian was standing by. (All these things entered into my calculations. There are times when a slide rule is a handy aid to poker problems.)

There were five hands in this game. Three were nondescript fair-to-awful players, while the fifth was the rawest of tyros. I smiled, to myself of course, as I watched him drop three cards in an attempt to shuffle. He did not blush in proper shame as he asked if a flush beats a straight. In appearance, he looked exactly like a man who would drop three cards on the shuffle and who would ask if a flush beat a full house. I smiled in benign superiority, promising myself not to be too hard on the lad.

Well toward the end of the evening it was my good fortune to find two very respectable pairs in my hand on the deal. I make mention of the fact that there was no limit. It was the sky, if a man's courage was equal to it.

I opened for the size of the pot. Such noncommittal betting is desirable. It neither boasts of, nor apologizes for, the hand of the opening player. Of the remaining four contestants, three chose to vie with me for the pot that had risen to awesome proportions with our four remaining players.

The draw is lost to my memory, except that the beginner on my right took one card. I therefore plugged him as trying for a straight or flush. My one card did nothing to improve my hand. I checked into the man who had taken one. This is sound policy among knowing poker players. To bet into

the one-card man is to expose oneself to a rattling raise. It also makes him appear unnecessarily foolish in having to call the raise and lose.

The two others dropped. My sighs of relief were purposely kept inaudible. That would be to confess even greater weakness than was told by my checking move. The boot was not dropping. He made a very substantial bet, the size of the pot, in fact. That left me with the hard choice of either paying to see his cards, or admitting that I considered my hand in this case utterly without worth.

It was at this point that I brought into play my superior knowledge of poker and player psychology. One has to think in these instances. Now, I hoped as I fondled my chips, figuring that the clicking sound would tell on his untrained nerves, the beginner will not have the courage to bluff. Had I not seen him blush when he could not spread his hand in a workmanlike fashion? Had he not asked whether three of a kind would take a flush? Certainly, and plainly, he had made either a flush or a straight.

I threw in the two pair, face upward, permitting a look of quiet wisdom to spread itself over my features. Not that it mattered in the least, I noticed that the other players approved of my folding actions.

"I guess you win, son." My voice held no rancor. I was the exemplar of good sportsmanship. "You probably got a straight. Drag the pot. It's your deal, also."

"Golly, sarge, how did you know?"

I swallowed my resentment at the anemic epithet. One must not let his prejudices trip up his card judgment. My two pair were already lost in the pack as he spread five cards on the table. I was counting my remaining chips when a growling voice from the other side of the table said,

"Hey, Dilbert! That ain't no straight. You can't stretch two to seven."

The boot's mistake was actually a source of embarrassment to me. Tolerance is a good thing to carry into the game. There was immense understanding in my words as I said,

"Son, I will tell you a few facts about this game."
"Yes, Sarge."

By Gadfrey, one could like a young fellow of that sort. Yes, even help him along with the fruit of my many years' experience. It is good to hear the men with little time bespeak their willingness to respect the havers of experience.

"Look, a straight is five cards in consecutive order, like four, five, six, seven, and eight; or nine, ten, jack, queen, and king. See?"

"Yes, Sarge."

Ah, such malleability! A good man, this kid. The makings of a sound poker player. And Marine, too. I determined that he should profit by my years of hard knocks.

"And, son." There was no design toward intimidation in my tone; merely friendliness from an older, more knowing man. "Two to seven does not beat two pairs, even threes and deuces."

"I get it Sarge."

"Now just make certain this little lesson has gone home, I will take this trifling pot."

My hands had already curved themselves around the money on the polished brown of the table. "Everyone saw my hand; it's in the deck somewhere."

"You will take nothing, Mac. And love it. You threw your hand in," said the tyro.

His brusque unmannerliness caused me some pain as he thrust my hands aside.

"A penny up for the next hand, you guys!"

I couldn't remember having given him any instructions on that point. Perhaps I shouldn't be so scientific.

END

Famous Last Words: "I play scientific poker"