

Out of Bounds

SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Poker

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS
ABOUT HOW TO GET IN THE
COUNTRY'S HOTTEST NEW GAME

BY MARK LUCE

On Aug. 2, 1876, famed gunman and cardsharp Wild Bill Hickock pulled a pair of black aces and black eights

while indulging in a game of poker at Saloon No. 10 in Deadwood, a rough and tumble gold rush town in the Dakota territory. Unfortunately, Hickock wouldn't finish that hand: a ne'er-do-well named Jack McCall gunned him down from the back. That hand — bullets over eights — became known as "Dead Man's Hand."

Thankfully, the game of poker has become a bit more civilized since the early 19th century, when a variation of poker, played with 20 cards, was used by riverboat mountebanks to rob unsuspecting suckers of their "poke," or money. While the word "poker" wasn't officially used until 1834, links to the game go back to the French game of *poque* and the German bluffing game *pochspiel*.

Now, of course, the country has flipped for poker, fueled in part by ESPN's coverage of the World Series of Poker, the Travel Channel's World Poker Tour, the Bravo's Celebrity Poker Showdown, films like *Rounders* and James McManus's thrilling book, *Positively Fifth Street: Murderers, Cheats and Binion's World Series of Poker*. From local taverns to VFW halls, from the cyber-rivers of online action to the neighborhood game with buddies,

Texas Hold 'Em tournaments have captured the American imagination with a frenzy that shames fads such as pet rocks, Cabbage Patch Kids and Rubik's cubes.

So what's the draw? Well, it takes nerve, psychology, luck and smarts to play the game well. Then there's the visceral thrill of winning. In the words of hustler extraordinaire Fast Eddie Felson, "Money won is twice as sweet as money earned."

Texas Hold 'Em is a quick game, too, with two cards in the hole (only you see them) and then five cards up (community cards). From those cards, you build the best five-card hand possible. The game can be invigorating and heartbreaking simultaneously. Watching it on television is surprisingly exciting.

Now before you rush out and blow \$10,000 to try to get a seat at a table in the World Series of Poker, let's talk a little common sense. Gambling can be addictive, which can ruin your life and family. If you remain hot to play for stakes at a casino, know your limits and learn the game and its rules (Hoyle's *Rules of Games*). Trust me, losing money doesn't make you smarter, better looking or more manly.

It only makes your wallet thinner. If you're going to head to the casino, take an amount that you know you can afford to lose. Otherwise, stay at home and sit at an Internet table and play with fake money.

If you're like me and you enjoy the game but don't want to lose \$200 to folks you don't know, host your own game. Anywhere from five to seven players make for a decent poker night. In our game, we don't bring more than \$20 to the table, and play nickel/dime/quarter games — Low Chicago, Pass the Trash, Seven Card Stud, Baseball, Five Card Draw — with a maximum of three raises per turn. With those stakes, even the worst card player can survive for a few hours.

You'll improve over time by playing at home or online because you'll learn how to bet, bluff and fold more effectively.

While we're on the subject of crucial poker skills, Kenny Rogers had it right: Knowing when to fold 'em is probably the most important skill to have in playing poker.

Mark Luce is a freelance writer who lives in Lawrence, Kan., where he can't ever seem to win with just two pair.

GOLFDOM (ISSN 1526-4270) is published monthly by Advanstar Communications Inc., 131 W First St., Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Subscription rates: One year \$30 (U.S. and possessions), \$49 (Canada and Mexico) and \$78 (all other countries). Air expedited service is available in countries outside the U.S. and Canada for an additional \$45 per year. Current issue single copies (prepaid only) \$5 (U.S. and possessions), \$7 (Canada and Mexico) and \$8 (all other countries). Back issues (if available, prepaid only) \$10 (U.S. and possessions), \$14 (Canada and Mexico) and \$16 (all other countries); add \$6.50 per order shipping and handling for both current and back issue purchases. Periodicals postage paid at Duluth MN 55806 and additional mailing offices.



POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to GOLFDOM, 131 W 1st St, Duluth, MN 55802-2065. Canadian G.S.T. Number: R-124213133RT001, Publica-

tions Mail Agreement number 40017597. Printed in the U.S.A.

Copyright (c)2004 by Advanstar Communications, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or the internal or personal use of specific clients, is granted by Advanstar Communications for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Dr., Danvers, MA 01923, phone 978-750-8400, fax 978-750-4470. Call for copying beyond that permitted by Sections 107 or 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law. For those not registered with the CCC, send permission request in writing to Advanstar Marketing Services, Attn: Permissions, 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44130 or fax to 440-891-2740.