



## The Best of Both Worlds

The wave of the future in poker?

POKER PLAYERS OF the 21st century are lucky people, because they have an option that we old-timers could only dream of less than a decade ago: playing either live or online poker. Each has its advantages.

Seeing your opponents is greatly beneficial. When an opponent is taking a long time to make a decision, you know he is not out in the kitchen getting a sandwich or coping with a misbehaving child. There is no question that a good player is aided by being able to use his ability to read people. In fact, one could say that the chief advantage of experience for someone like me over one of these persons who specializes in Internet poker is the ability to read one's opponents.

Poker is a social game, as well as an activity to earn money. Where else do you get the opportunity to chat with a congressman, billionaire, sports hero, or movie star? I think that I have made more friends and acquaintances at the poker table than in all of the other activities of my life combined. I enjoy chatting with people while playing poker, and have learned a lot from these conversations.

On the other hand, playing on the Internet has some undeniable advantages. You can play without leaving your home. You can play in several games at the same time. You can play with opponents from all over the world. These types of advantages simply cannot be duplicated in a brick-and-mortar environment. But what about the advantages of the Internet that could be duplicated in a brick-and-mortar environment? Not all of the advantages that we presently think of as belonging to the Internet are really integral to that medium and no other. Let me explain.

One of the most important advantages of the Internet is that a mailman does not deliver the mail. Of course, I am referring to the fact that a computer deals the cards, rather than a dealer. And recognize that a computer screen that shows cards and betting can be in other places besides your home. Look at all of the benefits derived from a computer-dealer:

**1. MISTAKE-FREE DEALING.** With a computer-dealt hand, there are no misdeals. One does not have to slow up the game to redeal the cards because a card flipped over, the wrong person was dealt to first, or the button was left in the same place two hands in a row. Once the hand is under way,



The Poker-Tek table

nobody deals the next round of cards before the betting has been closed, tells the wrong player the action is on her, or miscounts the amount of chips put into the pot. There is no question that human error detracts from the poker experience, and I have never tangled with a rude computer dealer.

**2. SPEEDY DEALING.** I would guess that a typical live hold'em game with an experienced dealer has about 35 hands an hour played. When a computer shuffles the deck, cuts the cards, and deals to each player, the number of hands per hour goes up greatly, to perhaps a hand a minute, or 60 hands per hour. Remember that besides the gain of having these things happening almost instantaneously, the game never gets held up by a dealer's error. A fast-paced game is one goal that the players and the house both support. The game is more enjoyable for all, and both the skillful player and the house, with its per-pot rake, derive a financial gain as a result of the time saved. (I note that the people who likely are the happiest of all at a given moment are the players who are stuck!)

**3. FREE DEALING.** A live dealer counts on tokens from the pot winners as a major source of his income. His gain is your loss. Of course, I take the dealer, and you should take the dealer, but the fact remains that the token is a drain on your poker-playing profit. And if you prevent that drain by making it a policy to stiff the dealer, at the very least, you are making a statement to the world that you are a selfish person who does not care about the other guy. Good luck in finding a spouse or business partner at the poker table.

I again would like to emphasize that the listed benefits are not confined to playing poker on the Internet. They are the benefits of having a computer-dealer rather than a live

dealer. There is no theoretical reason why a brick-and-mortar cardroom cannot use video screens and computer-run dealing and betting, mimicking Internet poker.

A few years ago, Lyle Berman, a great poker player and a great gaming industry businessman, made this prophetic observance to a group of people gathered around a dinner table: "At some point in the not-too-distant future, the human dealer will become obsolete in casinos." When Lyle talks, people listen. The result of this remark and the ensuing discussion was the formation of a new company, Poker-Tek, for the purpose of bringing computer-dealt poker to the casino environment. (Not surprisingly, Berman is one of the main investors in this company.)

Let's fast-forward to the spring of 2006. The computer-dealt poker game is now a reality, with a number of cardrooms already using the new technology. Here is how it works: There is a special table that has a large screen at its center for the boardcards and betting graphics, and a smaller screen in front of each player at the table. Of course, the individual player screen is built so that it can be seen only by the person seated directly in front of it, and not from the side. There is one server on the premises that controls all of the computerized poker tables. This is *not* Internet gambling, as the whole operation is on site, under full control of the establishment. At the present time, Poker-Tek, which is based in Charlotte, North Carolina, rents these tables out for a monthly fee. This represents overhead for the establishment, but the increased revenue from the much-faster games more than offsets the expenditure. And we have not even factored in the "health insurance," "retirement benefits," and "free food" that will not be given to the computer-dealer by the employer.

One of the benefits of having a dealer is to keep the game moving along. For this reason, it is a good idea for a cardroom that's using this computerized technology to designate a player in the game as the "table captain," to keep the game moving and ensure that no improprieties take place, such as making comments during a hand about what someone might be holding.

I believe that the new technology is going to have a great effect on the laws governing poker, which in many jurisdictions are written under the assumption that the "dealer" is a human being and that poker computer screens are always connected to the Internet. It is also possible to use the Internet with this new technology, connecting together a group of different cardrooms within a state in which all of the players and the server are located completely within the

physical boundaries of that state. Huge tournaments could be run with this method. The ease of collecting taxes and preventing minors from gambling that is available through this technology should not be overlooked by those legislators who wish to increase state revenue and are presently stymied by having the regular sources of revenue, such as personal, corporate, and sales taxes, maxed out. The Poker-Tek poker tables are going to have a much greater effect on poker in the world of the future than just fast-paced, error-free games. They will be a strong wind fanning the poker fire. ♣

*Bob Ciaffone has authored four poker books, Middle Limit Hold'em Poker (available at CardPlayer.com), Pot-limit and No-limit Poker (available at CardPlayer.com), Improve Your Poker (available at CardPlayer.com), and Omaha Poker. Ciaffone is available for poker lessons: e-mail [thecoach@cbartermi.net](mailto:thecoach@cbartermi.net). His website is [www.pokercoach.us](http://www.pokercoach.us), where you can get his rulebook, Roberts Rules of Poker, for free. Bob also has a website called [www.fairlawsonpoker.org](http://www.fairlawsonpoker.org).*

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