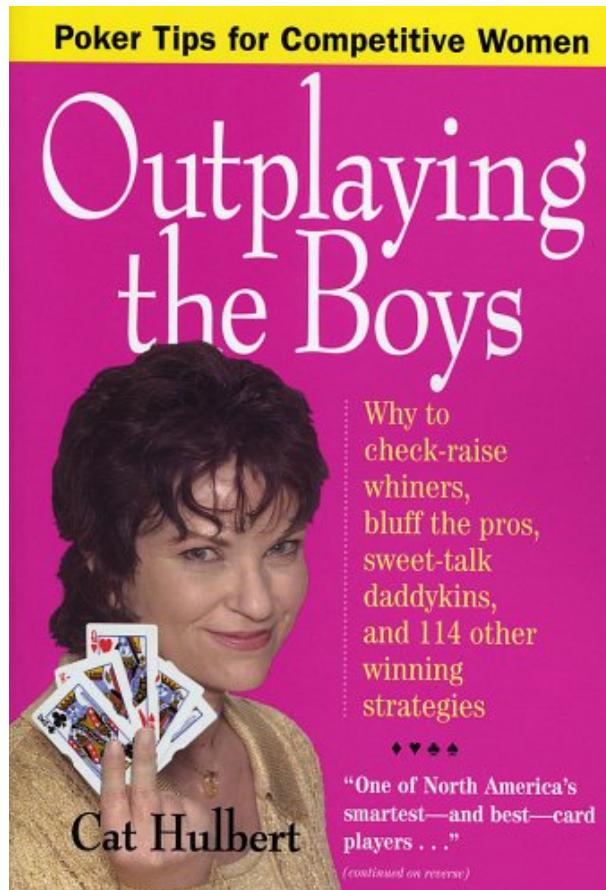


OUTPLAYING THE BOYS: POKER TIPS FOR COMPETITIVE WOMEN BY CAT HULBERT



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Poker Tips for Competitive Women

Outplaying the Boys



Why to
check-raise
whiners,
bluff the pros,
sweet-talk
daddykins,
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smartest—and best—card
players . . .”

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Cat Hulbert, a professional gambler for 30 years, was one of the first women to break into the ranks of professional card players. Card Player magazine named her one of the top seven-card stud players in the world, and the Game Show Network called her "the best female gambler on earth." She divides her time among playing high-stakes games, teaching poker to women at the Hollywood Park Casino, and writing. She lives in Torrance, California.

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I know what I know, and as Thoreau said, that is true knowledge. Trust me, in the world of competitive poker, I started at the top, toppled to the bottom, and climbed back to the peak and planted my flag permanently. Because of my hard-won experience, I can show you how to stay away from both opponent and self-made traps, how to avoid belly-flop embarrassment, and how to employ trickery to win the chips. I understand the pitfalls because I've broken free of every trap imaginable, short of gnawing off my foot. I've learned how to overcome disaster and become a successful professional by self-honesty; by determination, resilience, and drive; by soaking up knowledge like a greedy sponge; and, last but not least, by pure luck. (No one will tell you it's against the law to get lucky.)

My gambling career started at the age of 24 when I left my press job at the New York State Senate, packed up my Honda nicknamed Blue, withdrew all my savings (\$1,600), and drove head-on into Ohio's biggest snowstorm in 30 years. That's not necessarily the luckiest start, but I did meet a Lay's Potato Chips trucker while snowbound, who helpfully gave me the advice that I'd never make it in Vegas because my legs were too chunky.

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Any man would have laughed his toupee off at the prospect of me becoming a player and suggested I become a blackjack dealer or a cocktail waitress in a long skirt. But being a blackjack dealer is not being a player, which I quickly discovered when I got a job at the Rainbow Club in Henderson, Nevada, a suburb of Las Vegas. Bad luck befell me on the second day. The Rainbow Club changed its policy from the standard unisex dealer attire of black pants and a white shirt to cheekhigh hot pants for the women. I resisted on feminist grounds, but the real reason for my protestation was my linebacker gams. Twenty-four hours later I quit my first casino job on "moral grounds."

My next job was spinning the Big Six Wheel at the Union Plaza Casino in downtown Vegas, and two months later I moved up to dealing blackjack. It wasn't long before I began to discern that there were some true pros at the game. I wanted—no, I needed—to know their secrets.

One day a pro who looked like Sonny Bono wearing a fake Versace shirt came in, and I finally asked, "What's your system?" He looked startled and whispered back, "Shhh, meet me after work for coffee and I'll tell you."

At the time, I didn't even know such a thing as "card counting" existed, but I was about to get an up-close-and-personal education in it. Sonny Bono and I began dating, and he concocted a plan to teach me. He thought a woman card counter would be the greatest camouflage of all—simply because no one would ever suspect she'd be intelligent enough to use a system. What was wrong with the plan was that his team members thought having a female team member was as enticing as a skunk in a perfume shop. But Sonny persisted, and because he was the cash man and the team leader, the rest of the players begrudgingly fell in line. I kept practicing and practicing counting, sizing up how many cards were left in the deck, and dividing the remaining cards into the count.

At first, card counting seemed tough, owing to dividing fractions quickly, although now I think I could teach Koko the gorilla how to do it. It doesn't require mathematical genius, but rather the discipline to always follow the formula, to bear up under casino scrutiny, and to socialize and look like a tourist while simultaneously keeping rows of rapidly changing numbers in your brain. Maybe I am overestimating Koko, but the point is that you don't have to be a member of Mensa to count cards.

Because, as a woman, my abilities were still under suspicion, I was never allowed to bet the money, so my main function was as a spotter. A spotter acts anonymously, betting small and signaling the Big Player into

the game when the deck becomes rich in high cards. She or he then passes the Big Player the count and disappears into the sea of faces. Was I frustrated because the team members wouldn't give me a chance to play solo due to my gender? Frustrated isn't the word; piping-hot mad is more apt. All I wanted was the chance to prove myself competent to play under pressure. But no one had ever heard of a female card counter. Plus Vegas in the '70s wasn't exactly the equal-rights capital of the world. So without seeming self-congratulatory, I think for overcoming these chauvinistic attitudes and pioneering the way for other female players that I deserve a Benny Goodman toot or two.

As a member of Sonny's team, I traveled all over Europe, Asia, and Australia counting cards and slowly accumulating a bankroll. I was sharp and tough, and gradually gained the respect of my teammates because I could shove the money out without fear when the count called for it. Often people believe that's what divides the girls from the boys in gambling—how they handle fear. And although men think they are the braver of the two genders, it's not necessarily true. Woman guts and man guts look the same during an autopsy, and I would die trying to prove myself as a competitive equal. Well, maybe not on all fronts—I'm still happy I never got a draft lottery number.

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Even though I became an infamous player, barred on sight from casinos in such exotic places as Macau and Katmandu, my main desire was still to become a poker player. After 12 years on the blackjack circuit, I quit. I was tired of being backroomed by casinos, of facing hostility from dealers and pit bosses, of sitting in holding cells on trespassing charges, of always being on the road, and of living in constant fear of getting robbed. So I took a stab at making my first dream a reality.

How hard could it be to make the transition from blackjack to poker? They are both card games, right? Wrong! In poker, you can teach someone how to play a particular hand, but it's like chess—there are countless variations of the same situation that can occur and numerous levels of judgment that need to be plugged in. But even more than the complexities of the game, my main stumbling blocks were my confrontations with other players. Blackjack was just me against the house, but poker came with personalities that ranged from racist scumbag to snake-like vermin.

And if I thought I'd faced chauvinism in the blackjack world, I discovered that I hadn't scraped the surface of how threatened a competitive man can be by an aggressive and strong-willed woman. Instead of just thinking their thoughts or expressing grumbles of dissatisfaction, some male poker players try to verbally pick you apart like vultures.

Although I believed I would be oblivious to the attacks because I was a hotshot blackjack player, I turned into a vulnerable woman. At a time when I should have been concentrating on my game, I was perfecting my bantering techniques. I turned into a sucker, avoiding the truth, playing in the highest games with guys who could play rings around me. And instead of being focused on making money, I was concerned with winning the battle of the sexes. I lost badly, and the pain of crying into my pillow each night took its toll on my psyche, bankroll, and—even worse—my great-looking face. Safe to say, Benny put his clarinet down and took a long break.

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Now, I love poker—85 percent of the time I'd rather be playing than shopping at Nordstrom (and I'm a

shopaholic!). If you are a woman who's been nibbled by the gambling bug, whether it's a pastime or a professional pursuit, I can turn your curiosity into knowledge. But there will still be those days Mama didn't tell you about, and that's why I'm here to guide you past your ego and any personal weakness that may hinder your growth as a player. Poker is exhilarating when you win, and you can handle that side of it standing on your head. But when you lose, it's a test of character.

I have taught poker to women for several years, and through my own roller-coaster ride and through my interactions with my students, I understand where the traps lie for the novice. I can show you how to navigate around them and not get lost in the sea of wannabe players.

One dangerous pitfall is not being prepared to play against men who cannot stand losing to the weaker sex. Those men believe that because their muscular development is superior to ours, so is their psychological advantage. (Of cours...

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Whether it's in a casino, a private club, an online poker room—or even many friendly home games—when a woman sits down to play poker, she's usually facing men, and those men are going to typecast her as being too passive to be competitive. Guess what? She's got them right where she wants them! Women have a tremendous natural advantage at the poker table. Now it's just a matter of learning how to exploit it.

Written for female players who are in ever greater numbers catching poker-mania—60 million people a month are now playing poker and 30% are women—Outplaying the Boys is a street-smart guide to the green-felt jungle. By Cat Hulbert, whom Card Player magazine ranked as one of the top seven-card stud players in the world, its 125 annotated tips are filled with strategy, wisdom, and lessongiving anecdotes. How to project a winning image. How to choose the most profitable table—a talkative table will yield more than a quiet one—and the best seats (avoid the chair closest to the expert players). How to recognize and squelch your own tells. Who to bluff—the new player, the player who just made a comeback, the guy who comments on how tight you are. And who not to bluff—the short stack, the maniac who calls everything. Understanding your innate strengths and weaknesses—honing intuition, curbing your instinct to be too trusting, getting into opponents' heads. The book covers two key games—Texas Hold'em and Seven-Card Stud—and provides a glossary of terms, recommended books, and more.

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0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Cat's humor and knowledge is captured!

By Dawn E. Kimball

I am a student of Cat's and this book has captured not only her knowledge when it comes to poker but also her great sense of humor. This isn't a book to teach you how to play but one that will help you with some winning methods that the boys have no clue about. An easy read because of the smaller sections and infusion of tips and humor!

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Not for WOMEN only

By Linda Drucker

I only wish I had a copy of "Outplayong the Boys" when I first started playing poker in the early 80's! The information in this book is invaluable. Every tip should be practiced diligently by new and more seasoned players alike. Cat's humorous style of writing will keep you giggling and learning at the same time. A must read for all poker players, women and men alike..

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A must for every woman poker player

By A. Haman

I love this book. I have read dozens of books on poker and this is an absolute must read for all players.

However, this book also contains information that is specifically for women not found anywhere else. It would be better for ladies if the men never read its secrets. Many of the books on the market tell you how to play "cards," this book tells you how to play "poker." Believe me there is a difference.

It is obvious the author is an excellent poker player and it is wonderful to be able to learn from her wisdom. She teaches how to focus on numerous aspects of the game that are glossed over by other authors. (Possibly because this information is so valuable, other authors did not want to share it.)

If you are serious about learning how to become a good poker player, this book should be a part of your library. If you just want to have some good laughs and read some amusing poker stories, this book is also for you. Ms. Hulbert deftly manages to mix priceless lessons with a lot of humor for a truly entertaining read. As she explains, she has made a lot of the mistakes for you, and lets you learn from her experience. What a gift!

This book focuses on multiple aspects of the game and will/can take your play to the next level. This is not a book for beginners who do not know the difference between a flush and a straight, or want to know if they should play ace -nine off suit up front. That said, I wish I had this book to read years ago. This book will show beginners the concepts that every poker player should be thinking about, no matter what level.

On top of all that, Ms. Hulbert is also a very talented writer, so the book is very easy to read and hard to put down. I highly recommend it!

If you are a woman, read it. If you are a poker player, read it. If you simply like watching poker, read it. This book also offers valuable information for men, but with any luck, they won't read it.

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But I wasn't on my pilgrimage to Vegas to be a showgirl; my quest was to be a professional card player.

What were my chances in 1976? In a well-read blackjack book of the time, the author flatly stated that a woman doesn't have the emotional fortitude to become a winning gambler. I had so many emotions in my youth that I could have built Fort Ticonderoga with them. And emotions aren't necessarily a bonus when monetary fluctuations can make you feel like you're going over Niagara Falls in a wooden barrel. (By the way, the first person brave enough for that daredevil stunt was a 63-year-old schoolteacher named Annie Taylor.)

GETTING STARTED

Any man would have laughed his toupee off at the prospect of me becoming a player and suggested I become a blackjack dealer or a cocktail waitress in a long skirt. But being a blackjack dealer is not being a player, which I quickly discovered when I got a job at the Rainbow Club in Henderson, Nevada, a suburb of Las Vegas. Bad luck befell me on the second day. The Rainbow Club changed its policy from the standard unisex dealer attire of black pants and a white shirt to cheekhigh hot pants for the women. I resisted on feminist grounds, but the real reason for my protestation was my linebacker gams. Twenty-four hours later I quit my first casino job on "moral grounds."

My next job was spinning the Big Six Wheel at the Union Plaza Casino in downtown Vegas, and two months later I moved up to dealing blackjack. It wasn't long before I began to discern that there were some true pros at the game. I wanted—no, I needed—to know their secrets.

One day a pro who looked like Sonny Bono wearing a fake Versace shirt came in, and I finally asked, "What's your system?" He looked startled and whispered back, "Shhh, meet me after work for coffee and I'll tell you."

At the time, I didn't even know such a thing as "card counting" existed, but I was about to get an up-close-and-personal education in it. Sonny Bono and I began dating, and he concocted a plan to teach me. He thought a woman card counter would be the greatest camouflage of all—simply because no one would ever suspect she'd be intelligent enough to use a system. What was wrong with the plan was that his team members thought having a female team member was as enticing as a skunk in a perfume shop. But Sonny persisted, and because he was the cash man and the team leader, the rest of the players begrudgingly fell in line. I kept practicing and practicing counting, sizing up how many cards were left in the deck, and dividing the remaining cards into the count.

At first, card counting seemed tough, owing to dividing fractions quickly, although now I think I could teach Koko the gorilla how to do it. It doesn't require mathematical genius, but rather the discipline to always follow the formula, to bear up under casino scrutiny, and to socialize and look like a tourist while simultaneously keeping rows of rapidly changing numbers in your brain. Maybe I am overestimating Koko, but the point is that you don't have to be a member of Mensa to count cards.

Because, as a woman, my abilities were still under suspicion, I was never allowed to bet the money, so my main function was as a spotter. A spotter acts anonymously, betting small and signaling the Big Player into the game when the deck becomes rich in high cards. She or he then passes the Big Player the count and disappears into the sea of faces. Was I frustrated because the team members wouldn't give me a chance to play solo due to my gender? Frustrated isn't the word; piping-hot mad is more apt. All I wanted was the

chance to prove myself competent to play under pressure. But no one had ever heard of a female card counter. Plus Vegas in the '70s wasn't exactly the equal-rights capital of the world. So without seeming self-congratulatory, I think for overcoming these chauvinistic attitudes and pioneering the way for other female players that I deserve a Benny Goodman toot or two.

As a member of Sonny's team, I traveled all over Europe, Asia, and Australia counting cards and slowly accumulating a bankroll. I was sharp and tough, and gradually gained the respect of my teammates because I could shove the money out without fear when the count called for it. Often people believe that's what divides the girls from the boys in gambling—how they handle fear. And although men think they are the braver of the two genders, it's not necessarily true. Woman guts and man guts look the same during an autopsy, and I would die trying to prove myself as a competitive equal. Well, maybe not on all fronts—I'm still happy I never got a draft lottery number.

FROM BLACKJACK TO POKER

Even though I became an infamous player, barred on sight from casinos in such exotic places as Macau and Katmandu, my main desire was still to become a poker player. After 12 years on the blackjack circuit, I quit. I was tired of being backroomed by casinos, of facing hostility from dealers and pit bosses, of sitting in holding cells on trespassing charges, of always being on the road, and of living in constant fear of getting robbed. So I took a stab at making my first dream a reality.

How hard could it be to make the transition from blackjack to poker? They are both card games, right? Wrong! In poker, you can teach someone how to play a particular hand, but it's like chess—there are countless variations of the same situation that can occur and numerous levels of judgment that need to be plugged in. But even more than the complexities of the game, my main stumbling blocks were my confrontations with other players. Blackjack was just me against the house, but poker came with personalities that ranged from racist scumbag to snake-like vermin.

And if I thought I'd faced chauvinism in the blackjack world, I discovered that I hadn't scraped the surface of how threatened a competitive man can be by an aggressive and strong-willed woman. Instead of just thinking their thoughts or expressing grumbles of dissatisfaction, some male poker players try to verbally pick you apart like vultures.

Although I believed I would be oblivious to the attacks because I was a hotshot blackjack player, I turned into a vulnerable woman. At a time when I should have been concentrating on my game, I was perfecting my bantering techniques. I turned into a sucker, avoiding the truth, playing in the highest games with guys who could play rings around me. And instead of being focused on making money, I was concerned with winning the battle of the sexes. I lost badly, and the pain of crying into my pillow each night took its toll on my psyche, bankroll, and—even worse—my great-looking face. Safe to say, Benny put his clarinet down and took a long break.

CHANGING MY TUNE

How did I turn things around? Well, I swallowed my pride, dropped down to the small games, found a great poker teacher who forced me to face my weaknesses, and mastered the secrets of the founding principles of poker.

Now, I love poker—85 percent of the time I'd rather be playing than shopping at Nordstrom (and I'm a shopaholic!). If you are a woman who's been nibbled by the gambling bug, whether it's a pastime or a professional pursuit, I can turn your curiosity into knowledge. But there will still be those days Mama didn't tell you about, and that's why I'm here to guide you past your ego and any personal weakness that may

hinder your growth as a player. Poker is exhilarating when you win, and you can handle that side of it standing on your head. But when you lose, it's a test of character.

I have taught poker to women for several years, and through my own roller-coaster ride and through my interactions with my students, I understand where the traps lie for the novice. I can show you how to navigate around them and not get lost in the sea of wannabe players.

One dangerous pitfall is not being prepared to play against men who cannot stand losing to the weaker sex. Those men believe that because their muscular development is superior to ours, so is their psychological advantage. (Of cours...

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