

THE AMATEUR'S MIND

THE EMOTIONAL VALUE OF YOUR HAND

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Reading players in the midst of battle can be challenging. Our vision is often clouded by attachment to our own cards. (We have all heard the familiar warning: *Don't get married to your hand.*) How strong are your cards? And what is your willingness to lay them down? The answer to these questions determines the "emotional value" of your hand.

This is why it's so important to observe play when you are not involved - there is no emotional investment to distort your perception. Some players take a mental break when they are not in a hand, but this can be a lost opportunity for a clear read. When a big pot is brewing, you should pay close attention - because the next one may involve you.

Past information about players can be important, but may not apply to the present. Here are some of the questions you should be asking yourself about the other players at the table:

Are they pushing or just calling hands?

What have they shown down, and how is their luck running? (If they have been running good, they might start feeling invincible.)

Have they been following raises with standard continuation bets, only to fold when someone else shows strength?

Have they bluffed at many pots; and if so, what was the size of the bet?

A bet is the only physical tell that can't be hidden, because chips must make it into the pot. To avoid conflicting information, try dropping your head down to focus on hand and chip movements. Do the chips arch into the pot? Is it a smooth action? Do they splash the pot? How did the players move the chips in on past hands, and how are they putting them in now?

The amount of information that can be gathered at a poker table is unlimited. When the truth hits the felt, it all boils down to this: Have you gained enough information when not emotionally involved in a hand to make the proper decisions when you are involved?

Michael Rome can be found at his "poker philosophy" website: www.romepoker.net; and pro John "Jet" Taylor can be found at www.wptjet.com.