

THE 300 OF SPARTA: LESSONS FOR THE POKER BATTLEFIELD

TACTICS WIN WARS AND POTS

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“Come back with your shield, or on it.”
-Queen Gorgo from the movie 300.

In 480 B.C. a small group of Greeks defended their homeland against a massive force of Persians at the battle of Thermopylae. The Greeks were led by King Leonidas of Sparta and his 300 warriors. By the end of the battle, 2,300 Greeks had gathered to hold off 240,000 of Xerxes’ army for three days. This gave the Athenians time to prepare for a decisive naval engagement, which ultimately resulted in Greece winning the war. The tactics and strategies of King Leonidas have been studied throughout history, and now we examine their usefulness for the poker battlefield. All quotes are from the movie *300*, a fictionalized depiction of the battle of Thermopylae.

Preparing For Battle: *“There’s no room for softness, not in Sparta. No place for weakness.”* At the age of seven, Spartan boys entered into a severe military training process called agoge. They were given one small piece of material for clothing, were intentionally underfed, and made their own bedding out of wild reeds. They were encouraged to steal food, but were severely punished if caught. (Sounds a lot like being trained to bluff.) This training hardened them, but also taught them focus and resourcefulness. To be at the top of your game in poker takes mental and physical training, including adequate sleep, exercise, study, and nutrition.

Fighting The Battle: *“We will funnel them into the mountain pass... in that narrow corridor, their numbers will count for nothing.”* By forcing the site of battle, the Spartans narrowed down the number of Persians they had to fight at any one time. This tactic is also crucial in poker. You cannot take on the whole table at once. You narrow down opponents by raising. To fight with sword and shield you can only take on one or two opponents at a time... and even just two is twice as hard. Funneling down the enemy by raising is the main lesson from the Spartans.

The Athenians brought many more men than the Spartans to then aid in the fight. King Leonidas questioned the Athenian men to find out their professions... to which they would respond “potter” or “artist.” He

then remarked, *“See, I have brought more soldiers.”* In poker you can often choose your opponents. Try to learn from the warriors and make money from the potters. You don’t have to be the best, just the best at your table.

“His helmet was stifling, it narrowed his vision. And he must see far.” Sometimes armor works in both directions and prevents you from clearly seeing the enemy. The armor of a poker player can be sunglasses, hats, headphones, or just looking down quietly to hide from the opponent. If you aren’t watching your opponent, you won’t see the ultimate action taken. How did they handle their chips? How did they throw them in? If they are studying you closely for information maybe it’s because they’re weak. Use your helmet for protection, but don’t let it blind you during battle.

After the Battle: *“Unlike the cruel Leonidas, who demanded that you stand, I require only that you kneel,”* said Xerxes to the Spartan traitor Ephialtes. Leonidas and the 300 were defeated after they were betrayed by the deformed Ephialtes who showed the Persians a way around the pass. Ephialtes had wanted to fight alongside the Spartans, but they ridiculed and scorned him because of his deformities.

It is a good practice after a poker session to evaluate what you may be ignoring at the table, or perhaps, belittling in your opponents. Poker tends to punish those who overlook things in their arrogance.

Take into consideration the Greek strategy of battle when contemplating your next plan of attack at the poker table. You just might discover the secret to becoming a better warrior that will ultimately result in winning the war.

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