

Bluffer's guide to POKER

POKER PLAYER 'NASTY' NICK BATEMAN REVEALS THE INSIDE TRACK ON HOW TO PLAY THE TABLES



Poker is a bit like being on *Big Brother*. You're trying your best to screw the 10

people around you in order to win! But, more seriously, poker is major business with over 1.8 million people playing online every day, and countless millions playing in casinos, homes, hotels and bars worldwide. The word on the street is that pokermania is here to stay.

♣ TV stations broadcast celebrity poker shows late at night (we'd probably play tiddlywinks if it were televised!) and poker is now the third most-watched sport on cable TV in the world. I've competed in charity celebrity poker tournaments for various TV stations and played against other celebs, from Michael Greco to Howard Keel. Some I win; some I lose. "Poker, darling? It's the new bridge" seems to be the current catchphrase of the middle classes.

2 I love playing poker. Be it online, televised from a club in Las Vegas or in some dingy pub with mates late at night. It's an easy game to learn, even easier to make money from – but you can lose a fortune too. Like my celebrity mate in Vegas can testify, but more of that later...

♠ Don't let the thought of losing put you off as even novices can do well. The first time that mother-of-two Pam Brown entered an online competition, she came second. That gave her a seat at the UK Poker Open Championships and her husband, a seasoned poker player, didn't even get through the qualifying rounds!

4 I play my poker 'tight' like 10-times World Series winner Phil Hellmuth Jr. This means you only play good hands. When you have poor cards you stop betting and throw in your hand. It also means you'll be able to bluff down the line, as people will assume, by the nature of your play, that you have good cards.

♣ Bluffing, according to movies like the Bond film *Casino Royale*, is commonplace in high stakes poker. What gives bluffing away, other than unusual or over-ambitious betting, are 'tells' – human giveaways. A quick smile, a finger tap, running hands through hair, rapid eye movement, striking up conversations with the people you're playing with. The human body betrays emotions, especially when you've a good pair of cards in your hands. That's why some players wear dark sunglasses or a hat, or both.

6 In reality, bluffing is not the norm. It's only in movies or cheap fiction that you see outrageous

bluffing. But it can be a useful weapon when used correctly. Next time you play, just watch your opponents for the first few hands and look out for any 'tells' that might be on display, however subtle – they'll definitely be looking out for yours.

7 One way not to play is 'loose'. That's not a moral judgment; it means that despite being dealt the worst two cards you end up hoping and praying that the dealer and the five community cards (those dealt face up and shared by all players) are going to help you. Believe me, it's not going to happen. Play in this way and you're gambling, not playing poker.

8 I recommend that you start playing 'tight' with a cloud of 'looseness' thrown in so that people will find it very hard to read your game. I played six online games last week. Four of those I played 'loose' and I lost them all. The rest I played 'tight' and won, taking away a very nice £500.

9 Temperament is important. You'll occasionally lose to people who've played badly or simply been lucky. Stay focused and don't take your anger out on your play. Otherwise you'll go 'on the tilt' – you'll lose money and your position in the game.

10 Never play above your level. When I play in Las Vegas I do so at \$100 tables. The minimum you can sit down with is \$100 – within an hour you can either be a few thousand dollars up or \$100 down. After playing 'tight' for eight hours or so I often walk away full of Jack Daniel's and \$2,500 up. This was not good enough for my celebrity friend (who I mentioned earlier). He got bored and moved to the \$1,000 table – and lost \$18,000 in the space of a few hours.

11 Keep a record of how you do at different levels and variations of the game. Try 'limit' poker (it has a pre-defined number of raises in a betting round) and 'no limit' poker (no cap to the number of raises). Once you find your game, you'll be hooked. Whenever you win a game, put the profit in one pocket and the original stake in another.

12 Whether you're playing online or at a table full of strangers, choosing that table, your position and even the time of day you play at can be crucial. If you've not already spotted the sucker around the table, it's probably you. Happy cards, and remember, be clever and wily but never nasty...●

