

STUDY SESSION 4

Small Ball Versus Long Ball

Small Ball

- A style of tournament play characterized by pot control, positional advantage, and trapping.
- Little to no three betting.
- Speculative hands are important to this style of play.
- Hands such as KQ, AT, etc have lesser value since they usually make second best types of hands.
- Positional Advantage is very important.
- The deeper the stacks, the more effective small ball play is.
- Bluffing is done on proper board textures.

Small Ball (con't)

- Open raises are smaller than standard (2.2 to 2.5x generally) to keep pots smaller.
- Small ball is a difficult style to defend as you often don't know where you are in a hand against a small ball player because they tend to just call.
- Small ball players only tend to play big pots when they have a big hand.
- Small Ball requires a strong understanding of board textures, opponent's hand ranges, etc.
- Small Ball is not effective under 50 BB.
- Small Ball is the predominant style among professional tournaments players, including Daniel Negreanu, Phil Helmuth, Phil Ivey, and Jason Mercier.

Long Ball

- “Go Big or Go Home”
- A style characterized by pushing small edges, especially early, in order to build a large stack to use as a battering ram against opponents.
- Long ball requires unbridled aggression, but also an understanding of when to back down.
- Being able to read a situation is key to long ball. Sometimes you go with top pair mid kicker and sometimes you fold a set because you feel they are the right play at that time.
- Long ball requires a thick skin as you will often bust out of tournaments very early in an effort to build a monster stack.
- Long ball play usually escalates the pot pre flop or on the flop. There generally isn't a ton of post flop play.
- Long ball can be effective in deeper tournaments but is most effective in faster structures.

Long Ball (Con't)

- Long ball play usually requires putting in the final raise in a hand.
- Long ball players tend to be very loose aggressive.
- Be very aware if you have a long ball player at your table and they have amassed a big stack.
- Defending against long ball requires a lot of patience.
- Noted long ball players include John Phan, Vanessa Selbst, and Gus Hanson.

Future Reading and Learning

- *Poker Tournament Formula 2* by Arnold Snyder has sections on both small and long ball and does a good job pointing out strengths and weaknesses.
- *Power Hold em Strategy* by Daniel Negreanu has an extensive section (about half the book) dedicated to small ball. You can also get the same content by signing up for *PokerVT*.
- You must know how to play both styles to some degree if for no other reason than to be able to play against players using those styles.
- Each style has strengths and weaknesses.