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No-limit Texas hold'em: A complete course

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Bob Ciaffone, the author of four poker books, finished third in the 1987 Poker World Championship event. He has been a professional poker player, writer, and teacher for most of his life. As of April 2007, his four best students had won well over two million dollars in tournament prize money.

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By [Angel Largay \(2006\)](#). Toronto ON Canada: ECW Press, ISBN: 978-1550227420. Price: \$27.95 CDN, \$24.95 U.S.

The book *No-Limit Texas Hold'em* authored by Angel Largay is subtitled *A Complete Course*. This subtitle is misleading. The book does not discuss either tournament play or medium- to high-limit cash game play. It is aimed at low-stakes, no-limit cash games. I agree that such games have a strategy distinct enough to merit a full book on how to play them. I also agree that quite a bit of the knowledge presented in such a book applies to other areas of no-limit play. However, this does not excuse using a subtitle that is clearly aimed at widening the range of potential purchasers rather than describing the contents of the book.

Another aspect of the book makes it less than complete. Even though this is not mentioned anywhere in the book, it is evident that the author plays in and discusses only live games. Nowhere is Internet poker addressed, even though there is a substantial difference between live and virtual poker.

This book could be considered “complete” in the sense that it starts out talking to the poker player who does not know how to play hold'em at all. Before the big poker boom of the 21st century, someone taking up no-limit hold'em would undoubtedly have had prior experience at limit hold'em, so that he or she would certainly be able to do rudimentary things such as reading the board properly. Nowadays, enough people go directly to no-limit hold'em without knowing how to

play any kind of hold'em that it is necessary and appropriate for a book aimed at the low-limit player to start out by assuming that the reader may well know zero about the game.

The information in the book about the author is meagre. It claims that Angel Largay is a “world-famous instructor at the Las Vegas Poker Boot Camp” and a “professional cash game player”, but lists few of his specific accomplishments. Since this is Mr. Largay's first poker book, and he is not well known in the poker world, one would think more would be told about his background than that he now lives in Las Vegas and has previously lived in Alaska and California.

Mr. Largay has a good command of English (though his style is a bit too breezy for my taste), and his book is well organized, so I expect some teaching background. His discussion of mathematical issues in poker is quite good, and some tables in the back appear to be both accurate and valuable, so he evidently has both math and computer skills. I do not understand why he would not give us more information on what he did before he seriously took up playing poker.

Despite the extensive discussion of poker math, Mr. Largay also puts a lot of emphasis—as he should—on people skills such as reading opponents and adopting the proper strategy for each opponent type. He presents information using a good blend of theory and illustrative hands. In these respects, I think *No-Limit Texas Hold'em* is a well-balanced book.

I am sure the bottom line on any poker book is whether the advice in it is to be trusted. Most of the advice in this book is good, but the author is no Dan Harrington or T. J. Cloutier. I found some things in it that I did not care for. Here is a sampling.

When the pot odds are not adequate for calling on a draw, you need to look at the implied odds. Mr. Largay suggests that you call when the player is a loose calling-type player, but fold if the opponent is a really tight player, because your hand is not going to get paid off. For example, he describes a hand in which the opponent is a tight player who has raised preflop on a probable big pair, you have called on a 6c-5c (which I consider a bad play when no sandwiched players have called ahead of you), and the flop comes 8s-4d-2c. Money is deep—the pot is \$50 and you both have started the deal with \$500—and the opponent bets the size of the pot. What do you do?

Here is what Mr. Largay says: “Because this player is very tight, if you call this flop bet and he doesn't improve on the turn, he will check. If you bet \$150 on the turn, it is likely that he will fold even with AA or KK. If he won't pay you off when you make your hand, then you aren't getting the implied odds to call either”. I suggest that if you are facing a player who is going to fold on the turn if you apply heat, your chances are even better than if you are facing a player who is going to pay you off

when you hit. Mr. Largay does suggest a flop-raise might be right, but says, “If you call when you are getting insufficient odds, then you'll go broke”.

I admit being partial to raising, but if the preconditions are as he says, a call is also fine. If the opponent will probably check-fold on the turn, as the author says, then calling with the intention of taking the pot away from him on the turn is perfectly good poker. I should also say that if you are going to fold when you get this nice flop, why did you call the preflop raise in the first place?

This is not the only place where the author—who is partial to a raise-or-fold strategy—overlooks the value of calling when you have position and a draw and a good chance to outplay the opponent later. He dismisses a straight-draw when a flush-draw is on the board. However, fighting a preflop raiser with this kind of board while holding a straight-draw is much easier when there is a flush-draw. He is more likely to pay off the straight, and you can represent the flush if it comes.

I also did not care for some of the suggested betting amounts. Here is an excerpt about how to play a big-pair preflop:

When there is one early position limper for \$5, I'll raise to about \$40, which is about two times the size of the pot. An amateur who limps in early position has a hand that he will have difficulty throwing away for \$35 more, particularly against a player like me who has a reputation for splashing around.

I think it unlikely that someone who limps for \$5 is going to call a raise this big, regardless of who does it. The normal raise here is to \$20 or \$25, and all that raising a lot more is likely to do is have you win only \$12 on your bread-and-butter hands. Even if the author is actually able to get, somehow, the kind of action on a huge raise that he claims he can get, this is not going to work for the reader of the book.

To sum up, I think the book is well written, well organized, and has a lot of good information. On the other hand, I do not believe the author is a top player, and some strategies in the book are dubious. Should you buy this book? The answer depends on who you are. For someone who can mentally separate the wheat from the chaff, *No-Limit Texas Hold'em* may well be a worthwhile investment, but it is not a poker book that I would unhesitatingly recommend for everyone.

References

Largay, A.. (2006). *No-limit Texas hold'em: A complete course*. Toronto ON Canada: ECW Press.

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