

# National Poker League Rules

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The National Poker League has partnered with the Tournament Directors Association (TDA) to adopt a set of globally recognized rules to help govern games across the league. The TDA is the official association of poker tournament personnel and is dedicated to the advancement of the industry and adoption of uniform poker tournament rules across the globe. The TDA was founded in 2001 by gaming professionals Matt Savage, Linda Johnson, Jan Fisher, and David Lamb. Since inception, the Association has grown to over 1300 members in 39 countries.

The NPL has adopted the TDA rules as part of their league, and all venues and events will follow the below general rules and guidelines.

## Chip Colours



## General Rules/Concepts

### **1: Floor People – Tournament Directors**

Floor people and tournament directors are to consider the best interest of the game and fairness as the top priority in the decision-making process. Unusual circumstances can on occasion dictate that decisions in the interest of fairness take priority over the technical rules. The floor person's/Tournament Directors decision is final.

### **2: Official Language**

The English-only rule will be enforced in all National Poker League Venues and games. If players wish to converse in any language other than English, it can only be done away from the table, even if they are not taking part in current hands in progress.

### **3: Official Action Terminology of Poker**

Official terms are simple, unmistakable, time-honored declarations like: bet, raise, call, fold, check, all-in, pot (in pot-limit only), and complete. Specific regional terms may also meet this standard. The use of non-standard language is at player's risk because it may result in a ruling other than what the player intended. It is the responsibility of players to make their intentions clear. See also **Non-Standard & Unclear Betting Terms Rule # 41**

### **4: Communication**

Players may not talk on the phone while at the poker table or use a phone while in a hand. If the player is causing the game to slow down by utilizing mobile communication devices the Tournament Director may issue penalties according to **Penalties and Disqualification Rule # 47**.

## **Seating Players; Breaking & Balancing Tables**

### **5: Random Correct Seating**

Tournament and satellite seats will be randomly assigned. A player who started the tournament in the wrong seat with the correct chipstack amount will be moved to the correct seat and will take his current total chipstack with him. For a player sitting in the wrong seat with another player's chipstack, see **Recommended Procedure 5: Wrong Seat / Wrong Chipstack**

### **A: Special Needs**

Accommodations for players with special needs will be made when possible.

### **6: Breaking Tables**

Players going from a broken table to fill in seats assume the rights and responsibilities of the position. They can get the big blind, the small blind, or the button. The only place they cannot get a hand is between the small blind and the button.

### **7: Balancing Tables**

In flop and mixed games when balancing tables, the player who will be big blind next will be moved to the worst position, including taking a single big blind when available, even if that means the seat will have the big blind twice. Worst position is never the small blind. The table from which a player is moved will be as specified by a predetermined procedure. Play will halt on any table that is three or more players short.

In mixed events (ex: HORSE), when the game shifts from hold'em to stud, after the last hold'em hand the button is moved to the left (exactly to the position it would be if the next hand were hold'em) and then frozen at that position during the stud round. The player who is moved during stud is the player who would be the big blind if the game was hold'em for that hand. When hold'em resumes for that table, the button for the first round of hold'em will be at the position where it was frozen.

## **Pots / Showdown**

### **8: Declarations**

Cards speak. Verbal declarations as to the content of a player's hand are not binding; however, any player deliberately miscalling his or her hand may be penalized.

### **9: Face Up for All-Ins**

All cards will be turned face up once a player is all-in and all betting action at the table is complete. The dealer and players at the table should insist on timely compliance with this rule.

### **10: Showdown Order**

In a non all-in showdown, at the end of last round of betting, the player who made the last aggressive action in that betting round must show first. If there was no bet, the player to the left of the button shows first and so on clockwise. In stud games, the player with the high board must show first. In razz, the lowest board shows first.

### **A: Contested Showdown & Playing the Board**

All hole cards must be shown to win a contested showdown even if playing the board.

**B: Uncontested Showdown**

In a non all-in showdown, when the opponent(s) cards have been mucked without being revealed, the last remaining hand wins. The opponents also lose their right to ask to see the winning hand.

**C: Asking to See A Hand**

Any player that was dealt into a hand may ask to have a hand revealed in a showdown situation. Except where there is an expressed right to see a hand, asking to see a hand is a privilege granted at the discretion of the tournament director. This privilege is not to be abused.

**11: Killing Winning Hand**

Dealers cannot kill a winning hand that was tabled face up and was obviously the winning hand. Players are encouraged to assist in reading tabled hands if it appears that an error is about to be made.

**12: Odd Chips**

The odd chip will go to the high hand. In flop games when there are two or more high hands or two or more low hands, the odd chip(s) will go to the left of the button. In stud games, the odd chip will go to the high card by suit. However, when hands have identical value (e.g., a wheel in Omaha/8) the pot will be split as evenly as possible.

**13: Side Pots**

Each side pot will be split separately.

**14: Disputed Pots**

The right to dispute a hand ends when a new hand begins. (See **Rule 6: Shuffle**)

### **General Procedures**

**15: New Hand & New Limits**

When time has elapsed in a round and a member of the tournament staff announces a new level, the new level applies to the next hand. A hand begins with the first riffle. If an automatic shuffler is being used, the hand begins when the green button is pushed.

**16: Shuffle**

In all NPL games the shuffle will consist of a combination of the following.

A standard shuffle will consist of 1 x riffle, 1 x riffle, 1 x deck strip & 1 x riffle then cut - or 1 x riffle, 1 x deck strip, 1 x riffle & 1 x riffle then cut.

Players are also encouraged to use a short shimmy shuffle or wash of the cards prior to each deal

In all games whereby games are self-dealt, it is customary for the player to the direct right of the deal to cut the deck prior to the deal. In games where a dealer is used, they will be tasked with cutting the deck.

**17: Chip Race**

Chip races will be handled in two different manners depending on which type of event is being ran. For all regular tournaments such as nightly venue games or weekly games, Chip Races will be handled according to low level game rules outlined below. For all major events such as

Regional finals and Quarterly Majors, Chip Races will be handled according to the official TDA policy below.

### **Low Level Chip Races – Nightly Venue games or Weekly games**

When it is time for tournament staff to remove the lower denomination chips from play, the floor person or tournament director will simply exchange all lower denomination chips for higher denomination chips in a manner that sees accurate color ups. For example, if a player were to possess eight x \$25 tournament chips, they would receive two x \$100 chips from the tournament director. In any situation whereby there are not an even amount of chips for a player to color up, for example if a player only has one x \$25 chip, the tournament director will simply exchange each lower denomination chip with one higher denomination chip. In all situations where players have less than the required amount to color up to higher denomination chips, the floor person or tournament director will award that player with the minimum amount of higher denomination chips. For example, if a player has either one, two or three x \$25 chips, they will be awarded with one x \$100 chip. This process assists with the timely management of the event and will be used for all non-major events. If venues wish to adopt the Chip Race policy listed below for their minor events, they must first inform their players that they will be adopting it prior to the commencement of game play.

### **Official TDA Chip Race Policy – Major Events**

When it is time to color-up chips, they will be raced off with a maximum of one chip going to any player. The chip race will always start in the No.1 seat. A player cannot be raced out of a tournament: a player who loses his or her remaining chip(s) in a chip race will be given one chip of the smallest denomination still in play. Players are encouraged to witness the chip race.

#### Procedure for Chip Races

1. All players *colour up* their lesser-valued chips into greater denominations. For example, if the blinds have increased to a level where \$25 chips are no longer needed to post blinds, each twenty-five \$25 chips will be exchanged for a \$100 chip. Players will temporarily keep any leftover chips that cannot be fully coloured up to larger chips.
2. All leftover chips are counted, and equivalent chips in the larger denomination are presented to the table. Continuing the example, if there are 7 \$25 chips remaining among 6 players, 2 \$100 chips are prepared. In the event the remaining smaller chips do not add up to a whole larger chip, an extra larger chip should be added.
3. Each player with leftover chips in the smaller denomination will receive one card for each chip. The cards are typically dealt face up, starting from seat one, to the dealer's left. Each player due to receive cards will receive all of his cards before the next player, rather than a "traditional" card deal; the player on the little blind, for example, who is due to receive three cards for his three chips, will receive all three of his cards before the big blind receives any.
4. The larger chips are issued to the players with the highest single cards showing (poker hands do not count). No player is issued more than one chip. Ties (cards of the same rank) are broken by suit, using the ascending alphabetical order of the suits: Spades are highest, followed by Hearts, Diamonds, and Clubs. All remaining lesser-value chips are removed from play.

A chip race cannot eliminate a player from the game. In the event a player's last smaller-denomination chips are removed from play as part of the chip race, he automatically gets one coloured up chip if one is available. Any leftover coloured up chips go to the winner(s) of the chip race as described above.

**18: Deck Changes**

In self-dealt games, players may ask for the deck to be changed, however this will be at the discretion of the floor person or tournament director.

In all games that feature a dealer, deck changes will be on the dealer push or level changes or as prescribed by the house.

**19: Re-buys**

A player may not miss a hand. If a player announces the intent to rebuy before a new hand, that player is playing chips behind and is obligated to make the re-buy.

**20: Calling for a Clock**

Once a reasonable amount of time has passed and a clock is called for, a floor person or tournament director will be called for. At this time the player will be given a maximum of one minute to make a decision. If action has not been taken before time expires, there will be a 10-second countdown after which there will be a declaration to the effect that the hand is dead. If the player has not acted before the declaration, the hand is dead.

**21: Rabbit Hunting**

No rabbit hunting is allowed. Rabbit hunting is revealing any of the cards "that would have come" if the hand had not ended.

**Player Present / Eligible for Hand****22: At Your Seat**

A player must be at his or her seat by the time all players have been dealt complete initial hands in order to have a live hand. A player must be at his/her seat to call time.

**23: Action Pending**

A player must remain at the table if he has a live hand.

**Button / Blinds****24: Dead Button**

Tournament play will use a dead button.

**25: Dodging Blinds**

A player who intentionally dodges any blind when moving from a broken table will incur a penalty.

**26: Button in Heads-up**

In heads-up play, the small blind is on the button and acts first pre-flop and last on all subsequent betting rounds. When beginning heads-up play, the button may need to be adjusted to ensure no player takes the big blind twice in a row.

## **Dealing Rules**

### **27: Misdeals**

In stud-type games, if any of the player's two down cards are exposed due to dealer error it is a misdeal. In flop games, misdeals include but are not necessarily limited to: a) exposure of one of the first two cards dealt; b) two or more exposed or boxed cards; c) first card dealt to the wrong position; d) cards dealt to a seat not entitled to a hand; e) a seat entitled to a hand is dealt out. Players may be dealt two consecutive cards on the button. Once substantial action occurs, a misdeal cannot be declared and the hand must proceed.

### **27a: Pre-Flop Exposure of Cards in Holdem**

In the event that the dealer inadvertently exposes any player's hole card during the initial deal, the following procedure is followed.

- 1) The dealer will continue dealing all cards to active players
- 2) The dealer will then replace the exposed card with the next card from the deck (Would have been the burn card)
- 3) The dealer will then replace the exposed card face up on top of the deck until the betting round is completed and will use this as the first burn card

### **28: Substantial Action**

Substantial Action is defined as any two actions that put chips in the pot (bet, raise, or call), or any combination of three actions (check, bet, raise, call, or fold). The placement of the small blind and big blind is not considered as action.

### **29: Four-Card Flop**

If the flop contains four (rather than three) cards, whether exposed or not, the dealer shall scramble the 4 cards face down. A floorperson will be called to randomly select one card to be used as the next burn card and the remaining three cards will become the flop.

## **Play: Bets & Raises**

### **30: Verbal Declarations / Acting in Turn**

Players are required to act in turn. Verbal declarations in turn are binding. Chips placed in the pot in turn must stay in the pot.

### **31: Action Out of Turn**

Where a player bets out of turn, action will go back to the in turn player. If this player:

- CHECKS, the out of turn player is forced to check and take back their bet.
- BET LESS THAN THE OUT OF TURN PLAYER, the out of turn player is forced to flat call.
- BET MORE THAN THE OUT OF TURN PLAYER, the out of turn player is given all options with the exception of checking. If the out of turn player folds, their out of turn bet will stay in the pot.

### **32: Methods of Raising**

In no-limit or pot-limit, a raise must be made by (1) placing the full amount in the pot in one motion; or (2) verbally declaring the full amount prior to the initial placement of chips into the pot; or (3) verbally declaring "raise" prior to the placement of the amount to call into the pot and then completing the action with one additional motion. It is the player's responsibility to make his intentions clear.

### **33: Raises**

A raise must be at least the size of the largest previous bet or raise of the current betting round. If a player puts in a raise of 50% or more of the previous bet but less than the minimum raise, he or she must make a full raise. The raise will be exactly the minimum raise allowed (see exception for multiple same-denomination chips Rule 36). In no-limit and pot limit, an all-in wager of less than a full raise does not reopen the betting to a player who has already acted.

#### **34: Oversized Chip**

Anytime when facing a bet (or blind), placing a single oversized chip in the pot is a call if a raise is not first verbally declared. To raise with a single oversized chip, a declaration must be made before the chip hits the table surface. If a raise is declared (but not an amount), the raise is the maximum allowable for that chip. When not facing a bet, placing an oversized chip in the pot without declaration is a bet of the maximum allowable for the chip.

#### **35: Multiple Chips**

When facing a bet, unless a raise is first declared, multiple same-denomination chips is a call if removing one chip leaves less than the call amount. Example of a call: preflop, blinds 200-400: A makes it 1200 (an 800 raise), B puts out two 1000 chips without declaring raise. Placing chips of mixed denominations in the pot is governed by the 50% standard in **Rule 33: Raises**

#### **36: Number of Raises**

There is no cap on the number of raises in no-limit games. In limit events there will be a limit to raises even when heads-up until the tournament is down to two players; the house limit will apply.

#### **37: Accepted Action**

Poker is a game of alert, continuous observation. It is the caller's responsibility to determine the correct amount of an opponent's bet before calling, regardless of what is stated by the dealer or players. If a caller requests a count but receives incorrect information from the dealer or players, then places that amount in the pot, the caller is assumed to accept the full correct action and is subject to the correct wager or all-in amount. Rule 1 may apply in certain situations at tournament director's discretion.

#### **38: Pot Size & Pot-Limit Bets**

Players are entitled to be informed of the pot size in pot-limit games only. Dealers will not count the pot in limit and no-limit games. Declaring, "bet the pot" is not a valid bet in no-limit but it does bind the player to making a bet of a valid amount.

#### **39: String Bets and Raises**

Dealers will be responsible for calling string bets and raises.

##### Definition of a String Bet

A String bet is defined as a call with one motion and a later raise with another, or a reach for more chips without stating the intended amount. A player can (and should) defend themselves against string bet complaints by declaring their intention before moving any chips. Note that the "I call, and raise..." cliché is a string bet.

#### **40: Non-Standard Folds**

Anytime before the last action on the last betting round of a hand is finished, folding in-turn when facing a check or folding out of turn are both binding folds and may be subject to penalty.

#### **41: Non-Standard & Unclear Betting Terms**

Players use unofficial betting terms and gestures at their own risk. These may be interpreted to mean other than what the player intended. Also, whenever the size of an announced bet can have multiple meanings, it will be ruled as the lesser value. Example: "I bet five". If it is unclear whether "five" means \$500 or \$5,000, the bet will stand as \$500. See **Rules 3 and 33**.

#### **42: Conditional Statements**

Conditional statements regarding action are strongly discouraged; they may be binding and/or subject to penalty (example: "if – then" statements such as "If you bet, then I will raise.").

### **Play: Other**

#### **43: Chips on the Table**

Players are entitled to a reasonable estimation of an opponent's chip count, thus chips should be kept in countable stacks. The NPL recommends clean stacks in multiples of 10 or 20 as a standard. Players must keep their higher denomination chips visible and identifiable at all times. Tournament directors will control the number and denomination of chips in play and may color up at their discretion. Color ups should be announced.

#### **44: Chips in Transit**

Players may not hold or transport tournament chips in any manner that takes them out of view. A player who does so will forfeit the chips and will face disqualification. The forfeited chips will be taken out of play.

#### **45: Accidentally Killed / Fouled Hands**

Players must protect their own hands at all times. If a dealer kills a hand by mistake, or a hand is fouled, the player will have no redress and is not entitled to a refund of bets. However, if the player has bet or raised and hasn't been called, the uncalled bet or raise will be returned to the player.

#### **46: Dead Hands**

In stud, if a player picks up the upcards while facing action, the hand is dead. In Texas Holdem, a player's hand is declared dead when it is clear that their intention was to fold, they do not need to be in the muck to be declared dead by a floorman or Tournament Director. Note Rule 1 may from time to time apply and as such the tournament director will use the best judgment at all times, and from time to time may declare a hand live even if it has touched a part of the muck or a player has attempted to fold it.

### **Etiquette & Penalties**

#### **47: Penalties and Disqualification**

A penalty MAY be invoked if a player exposes any card with action pending, throws a card off the table, violates the one-player-to-a-hand rule, or similar incidents occur. Penalties WILL be invoked in cases of soft play, abuse, disruptive behavior, or cheating. Penalties available to the tournament director include verbal warnings, "missed hand" penalties, and disqualification. Except for a one-hand penalty, missed hand penalties will be assessed as follows: The offender will miss one hand for every player, including the offender, who is at the table when the penalty is given multiplied by the number of rounds specified in the penalty. For the period of the penalty, the offender shall remain away from the table but will continue to be dealt in.

Tournament staff can assess a one-hand penalty, one-, two-, three-, or four-round penalties or disqualification. A player who is disqualified shall have his or her chips removed from play. Repeat infractions are subject to escalating penalties.

#### **48: No Disclosure**

Players are obligated to protect the other players in the tournament at all times. Therefore, players, whether in the hand or not, may not:

1. Disclose contents of live or folded hands,
2. Advise or criticize play at any time,
3. Read a hand that hasn't been tabled.

The one-player-to-a-hand rule will be enforced.

#### **49: Exposing Cards**

A player who exposes his cards with action pending may incur a penalty, but will not have a dead hand. The penalty will begin at the end of the hand.

#### **50: Ethical Play**

Poker is an individual game. Soft play will result in penalties, which may include forfeiture of chips and/or disqualification. Chip dumping and/or all other forms of collusion will result in disqualification.

#### **51: Etiquette Violations**

Repeated etiquette violations will result in penalties. Examples include, but are not limited to, unnecessarily touching other players' cards or chips, delay of the game, repeatedly acting out of turn or excessive chatter.

#### **52: Personal Grooming**

Players may be subject to warning, penalty, or disqualification when their personal hygiene is offensive to other players.

#### **53: Absent from the Table**

If player is absent from the table for an extended period of time, it will be at the tournament director's discretion to issue warnings and or penalties including disqualification from the game.

# POKER TOURNAMENT DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION

## Recommended Procedures Version 2011 (1.0)

The TDA Recommended Procedures list deals with situations that may be too complex to address with a single universal rule. A fair ruling in these cases may depend on application of multiple rules, evaluation of all the circumstances, and reliance on Rule 1 as a primary guide. These recommendations are intended as general guidelines that may be useful in arriving at a ruling in a specific case.

### **1: Premature Board Cards:**

If possible, it is preferable to use a remedy that maintains as many of the original board & burn cards that would have come if the premature board card was not dealt.

Below are examples of premature Board Cards and how they should be handled.

#### **Premature Flop**

In the situation whereby a flop has been exposed prior to the pre-flop betting round being completed, the premature flop will be bought back and the pre-flop betting round will be completed. Once the betting round is completed, the tournament director or floorperson will then supervise the dealer to shuffle the pre-mature flop cards with the remaining deck (excluding the burn card and any muck cards) and then re-deal a new flop.

#### **Premature Turn**

In a situation whereby a turn card has been exposed prior to the flop betting round being completed, the floorperson or tournament director will instruct the dealer to first bring back the pre-mature turn card and place it to the side (not the pre-mature burn card) and then to complete the flop betting round. Once the flop betting round is completed, the dealer will then burn and turn a new turn card. This turn card would have been the river card if the pre-mature turn card were exposed. Once the betting round on the turn is completed, the dealer will take the pre-mature turn card that was dealt earlier and shuffle it into the remaining stub (Do not include any burn or mucked cards). Finally the dealer should then turn the river card from the freshly shuffled cards without burning.

#### **Premature River**

When a pre-mature river is dealt, the floorperson or tournament director will instruct the dealer to first bring back the pre-mature river card, then the betting round will be completed for the turn. The dealer will then shuffle the pre-mature river card into the remaining stub (Not including any burn cards or mucked cards) and without burning; a new river card will be dealt.

### **2: Disordered Deck Stub:**

When cards remain to be dealt on a hand, and the deck stub is accidentally dropped and disordered, it is first preferable to try and reconstruct the original order of the stub if possible. If this is not possible, it is then preferable to create a new stub using only the cards of the original stub (not the muck and prior burn cards). These should be scrambled, shuffled, cut, and play then proceeds with the new stub. If when disordered the stub cards are mixed with the muck and burncards, all players stand to be affected by this equally, thus the stub, muck & burncards should be scrambled together, shuffled, cut, and play proceeds.

### **3: All-In Buttons:**

Where possible it is preferable to use an all-in button so to more clearly indicate that a player's bet is "all-in". It is preferable for the all-in button to be kept by the dealer who will push it in front of a player who is all-in, in full view of the rest of the table.

### **4: Bringing In Bets:**

Routinely bringing in chips as betting and raising proceeds around the table is poor dealing practice. The reduction in bet chipstacks may influence the action, create confusion & increase the risk of error. The TDA recommends that dealers do not touch a player's bet unless asked for a count by the player currently facing action. The only player who may ask the dealer to bring-in chips is the player currently facing action.

### **5: Wrong Seat / Wrong Chipstack:**

Example: After the break a player sits at the wrong seat (with the chipstack of that seat), and wins or loses chips. This is a complicated occurrence that requires a case-by-case solution. In general it is preferable to A: try to reconstruct the original stack as closely as possible to its correct amount and then return the correct player to that seat. B: move the wrong player to the right seat. C: players may not gain chips as a result of this, but may lose chips. D: if this situation is discovered during the course of a hand, it should be treated like a fouled deck and chips returned to all players who have chips in the pot. These cases have a wide number of serious possibilities (example: the wrong player may bust another player). In some situations hands played in good faith may have to stand. Rule 1 must guide all rulings because there is no single remedy that will apply to every situation.

### **6: Personal Belongings**

The table surface is a vital area for chipstack management, dealing, and betting. The table and spaces around it (including legroom & walkways) should not be cluttered by non-essential personal items. The TDA recommends that each house formulate and clearly display a policy regarding items that may or may not be allowed in the tournament area.

### **7: Dead Hands**

#### **DEAD HANDS**

1. A hand is declared dead if:

(a) The player folds or announces that they are folding when facing a bet or a raise.

(b) A player throws their hand away in a forward motion causing another player to act behind them (even if not facing a bet).

(d) The hand does not contain the proper number of cards for that particular game

2. Cards thrown into the muck may be ruled dead. However, a hand that is clearly identifiable may be retrieved at management's discretion if doing so is in the best interest of the game. We

will make an extra effort to rule a hand retrievable if it was folded as a result of false information given to the player.