

BTCards: Proof-of-Study for the Poker Masses

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Abstract. The knowledge that wins at poker has been locked behind massive paywalls and hoarded by the successful few to protect their edge. What is sold is often the least of it: charts and long recordings, taught in ways that ignore how adults learn, while the reads and exploits that decide real games rarely leave the high-stakes rooms. This matters more every year. Over the past decade, the house’s “real take” has grown by nearly a third for every dollar of buy-in, while payouts have flattened toward a growing number of min-cashes, stripping equity away from the deep runs and final tables where skill is paid most heavily. Players cannot change what the game costs, but they can change what they know. We propose that poker knowledge be democratized: (a) withholding nothing; (b) streamlined and carried through to mastery, using scaffolding and other principles that research has consistently found effective; and (c) attainable at low cost, or none, for the players who need it most. Without it, the less-fortunate majority has little chance of closing the gap between losing and winning over time. BTCards (Beyond The Cards) introduces a learning system built on these principles, with a path to learn for free. Learn and apply at the tables to find your edge. Study and invite to learn for free.

1. Introduction

Tournament poker runs on a single flow of money: from the many to the few, and from everyone to the house. Most players lose. A small minority wins steadily. Published research on the largest tournament series has found exactly this pattern: a small group of skilled players earns strong returns, while the field as a whole loses money. Research on online play has shown that results persist over time, which is the signature of skill rather than luck.

If skill decides who wins, knowledge should be the way out. It rarely is. The players who understand the game best have little reason to teach it, because the players they would teach are the players they beat. What they do sell is often the least dangerous part of what they know: charts, solver outputs and long recordings, delivered in formats that ignore how adults actually learn. The most valuable skills, reading the specific players at your table and exploiting them, remain largely unsold.

What is needed is a path to winning knowledge that does not depend on a fortune, the right connections, or the goodwill of the people profiting from its scarcity. In this paper, we describe the costs players face today and where skill is still paid, then set out three principles for closing the gap: withhold nothing, teach to mastery, and make learning available to all.

We believe the knowledge that improves a player’s game should not be kept out of reach simply because it gives those who possess it a competitive advantage.

2. The Cost of Playing

Over the past decade, the share of tournament buy-ins consumed by rake has grown by nearly a third, while payouts have shifted away from the deep runs where skill is rewarded. Players are paying more for the opportunity to compete, yet the knowledge needed to compete effectively remains expensive and unequally shared.

Every tournament has one player who never loses: the house. Its share, which we call the real take, is the difference between what players pay and what reaches the prize pool. It is not always what is advertised: comparing the entries with a published prize pool can show the house keeping more than twice the posted fee.

An analysis of tournament payouts shows that, measured from the early 2010s, the increase in the real take passes a third. Since the pandemic, the share of the field that gets paid has risen from about 9% to about 13%, while the share of the prize pool reaching the final table has fallen by roughly 10%.

The take is only part of the cost. In the author's experience, regular players fire 1.8 to 2.4 entries per tournament, and a traveling player spends \$200–\$250 a day on travel and lodging. For someone firing twice into a \$400 event, a single day of expenses adds more than a quarter to the cost of playing.

3. Where Skill Gets Paid

The author's experience of how often a regular, grinder or professional reaches each stage of a tournament, per entry:

Outcome	How often
Cash at all	8–12%
Run deep, short of the final 2%	5–7%
Reach the final 2% (the final table or close to it)	3–4%
Win	under 1%

Skilled players often cash no more often than the field, and sometimes less, because they play to win rather than to survive. A minimum cash rarely returns a regular's total investment for the day. Only a finish in roughly the top 2%, worth four to five times a single buy-in, or about twice the average total invested, pays for the many tournaments that end with nothing.

That makes the shape of the payout table decisive. Payout structures have become increasingly flat, shifting equity away from deep runs and final tables toward a growing number of min-cashes, which are much closer to luck. That hurts every player trying to improve: the deep runs they are working toward now pay less, and the min-cashes that replace them rarely cover the cost of playing. The margin has never been thinner, which makes the edge a player brings to the table matter more, not less. Faster structures push in the same direction: the shallower the stacks, the more often a tournament is decided by an all-in, and the more every player's results drift toward the one certain outcome, the house's share.

Skill is squeezed from both sides. The house takes more off the top, and less of what remains goes to the finishes that skill earns. In the author's estimate, fewer than 2% of tournament players profit after the take and expenses, and only about the top 0.5% earn returns of 25–40% on every dollar they spend. Studies of tournament regulars agree on the broader point: most of them lose money in a given year, even among the players widely considered the best.

4. Withhold Nothing

Our first principle is the simplest: every skill that can create an edge should be taught, including the ones that are almost never sold.

I am among those who extracted millions from this system, across live tournaments, online play and cash games, and for years I passed almost nothing back. This paper is a partial repayment.

For years, I played low-stakes tournaments and spent many thousands of dollars on content from several of the world's best players: dozens of hours of recordings that were hard to review, stacks of charts that told me what to do but never why, and countless lessons with no quick way back to the topics that mattered most to me. Barely a word on reading and exploiting the players in front of me, range-capping, or live tells.

The breakthrough came only after I changed how I learned. A private coach who specialized in the technical game complemented my feel for it. AI tools taught me how to study and label my opponents, and then how to apply common exploits to each player type. The difference was never talent or effort. It was access, and the way the knowledge was taught.

What almost nobody teaches, at any price:

- narrow versus wide table configurations;
- exploiting player types, and recording evidence of their tendencies;
- population adjustments;
- limping strategies;
- marginal re-shove play with 25–35 big blinds;
- range-capping, and setting up a believable story to bluff with;
- separating bluff candidates from value hands;
- using ICM to your advantage, and avoiding ICM suicide.

Beyond The Cards teaches all of it, and holds nothing back.

5. Learn to Mastery

Our second principle is that knowledge only matters once it can be applied at the table. Beyond The Cards is built on established principles of instructional design: short, focused modules (microlearning), lessons released in spaced monthly batches rather than all at once, and every concept turned into hands you play rather

than lectures you watch or listen to. Each finished module leaves several tips in your personal library, along with your highlights, notes and bookmarks.

We have streamlined the path from knowledge to the table: short modules, practice for every concept, and review that takes seconds instead of a search through hours of recordings.

Complex skills are best learned with scaffolding: strong support at first, gradually removed as the player gains command. Independent research has consistently found that it improves learning. Each module builds on the last, and each concept is practised with guidance before it is tested without it.

New modules arrive every month, and members cannot work ahead of what has been released. This is deliberate. Knowledge outruns application: when information arrives faster than a player can use it, most of it is lost. Each monthly batch arrives with online practice, and with time to take it to the tables, where new skills actually stick. Learning spread over weeks is retained far better than learning crammed into a weekend, each concept builds on the last, and a steady pace prevents the burst of enthusiasm that fades by the third week.

Learning does not end when a module does. Beyond each module's quiz, a set of extra practice hands deepens every concept. Every quiz and practice hand a member plays is kept in a personal hand library, where it can be filtered by topic or module, sorted from lowest score to highest, and turned into a practice run of the member's own choosing, scored at intervals the member sets, every 20, 50 or 100 hands. Every hand a member misses comes back for review, a few days later and then at growing intervals, until it is answered right. Quizzes can be retaken until passed, and a mastery score shows how much of what has been taught a member can actually apply. A concept is not finished when it has been read. It is finished when it has been mastered.

Learning compounds with effort and time. A member should not be twice as good a year later. They should be playing an entirely different sport.

6. Learning for ALL

Our third principle is that cost should not decide who gets the knowledge. Those who have taken the most from the game should pay the most, and anyone willing to study and invite others should be able to learn for free.

Members pay in BiTCards. A BiTCard is \$30 at full price. Each month of training costs a fixed number of BiTCards, set by the member's career tournament winnings:

Tier	Career tournament winnings	BiTCards a month	Full price
Recreational	under \$300,000	4	\$120
Regular	under \$1 million	5	\$150
Grinder	under \$3 million	6	\$180
Professional	\$3 million and above	7	\$210

Members choose their tier on an honor system and confirm it each year.

BiTCards can also be earned. Completing three modules in a month earns a Learning BiTCard: proof of study. Every friend you invite who becomes a paid member earns you a Community BiTCard, every month they remain one. Invited friends receive a Welcome BiTPass: one free BiTCard every month, for as long as they stay a member without a break.

Early adopters become Founding Members. They receive a BiTPass (one free BiTCard a month) plus 33% off each BiTCard, both for their first 12 consecutive months, saving up to 50%. Monthly members keep the 33% by completing three modules each month.

For a recreational player who joined as a Founding Member or through a friend's invitation, the arithmetic is simple: study, invite two friends, and your month is free. A player who joined on their own needs one more friend, and each tier above needs one more again.

BiTCards are training credits only. They are not a cryptocurrency or a token, not an investment, and they have no cash value. They cannot be sold, exchanged or cashed out. Their only use is training at Beyond The Cards.

7. Calculations

If the house keeps a share r of every dollar entered, the field as a whole gets back only $(1 - r)$. To break even, a player must therefore beat the average entrant by $r \div (1 - r)$:

House take	Edge over the average entrant needed just to break even
10%	11%
12%	14%
16%	19%
20%	25%
25%	33%

These figures are before travel. Consider a regular who fires twice into a \$400 tournament at a 16% take and spends \$225 on one day of travel. The total cost is \$1,025. The average entrant gets back 84% of each entry, or \$672 for two entries. To break even on that day, this player must do about 52% better than the average entrant.

No player controls the house's take, the payout table or the structure. The only variable a player controls is what they know, and how well they apply it.

8. Conclusion

We have described a game in which the house's share keeps growing, payouts reward the finishes that skill earns less than they used to, and the knowledge that could change a player's results is held back by the people who profit from its scarcity. We propose to democratize the knowledge that wins at poker through three principles: withhold nothing, teach to mastery, and make learning available to all, charging the most to those who have taken the most from the game while letting anyone who studies and invites others learn for free. Without them, the less-fortunate majority has little chance of closing the gap.

The knowledge that wins at poker has been locked behind massive paywalls and hoarded by the successful few to protect their edge. There is now an accessible path to it for everyone. Join the waitlist and become a Founding Member at BTCards.net/manifesto.

Learn and Apply at the Tables to Find Your Edge. Study and Invite to Learn for Free.