

# BEWARE THE GARBAGE ACE

by Sam O'Connor

## The Perils of Ace-Rag

**AMAZING!!** A young man raises with ace-eight, is beaten by ace-king and describes himself as unlucky.

Later, on the same day, yet another young man raises from middle position with ace-jack and loses the hand. He recounts the play several times to everyone's silent forbearance, complaining about losing "with such a good hand."

It's happening in cardrooms everywhere. And everywhere one of the most commonly misplayed hands is the small, embarrassing fetid, garbage ace.

Let it be known. Hold'em is a game of big cards. Please notice the plural in that old bromide. It takes two big cards to tango for value in the dance of low blinds no-limit hold'em.

### SO WHAT IF WE PLAY THE GARBAGE ACE?

There is a known situation for garbage ace play. We've all done it, and we'll do it again.

We're waiting patiently for a hand we can launch, and that hand simply refuses to arrive. The big clock is ticking in 4/4 time. The good poker pockets never come. We're blinding our money away. We're losing the image of an action player. Things are so bad we're almost bored. Suddenly, we look into the pocket and we have ace-four suited. What a bonanza! We're in an early position but, at last, we have something to play. Well, not much, but we'll play.

In truth, we're holding a bomb.






We have a hand that can get us into

big trouble. What's the best we can expect from this flaccid starter? Well, barring such bizarre and wonderful things such as two aces or two fours, or three of our suit on the flop, we can't expect much. Even with one of those rare flops, we wouldn't win much money because we're viewed as tight and probably have all the good cards. But we're under way, carrying the garbage ace bomb to somewhere.

Now we're into the hand. We have called the big blind, just to be active, and there have been no raises. If there were a raise, we'd have mucked the ace-four, for sure, as we've done many times in the past.

We want to stay active, and that's why we're playing this piece of refuse.

It's four-handed and the flop comes A-9-7.

Pocket	Pocket	Flop	Flop	Flop
				

We're to act first. It's up to us. What do we do with this hand?

We have to check. That's the bad feature. We've made top pair and it probably isn't good. We're also under the gun. We have to check.

With the strong possibility of a bigger ace somewhere, we wouldn't want to run the risk of being discovered with a junk hand when there is so little to win

and we have so little invested. Plus, if we bet and are raised, we have to muck it and appear weak.

If there is a bet from one of the other three players, even if it is the button stealing the blinds, there is no reason to call. And we can't raise, at least not for value. So we throw the hand away. This is the usual fate of ace-x.

### ANOTHER SCENARIO

OK, now let's say the hand is checked around and we get to see a free turn card.

If the board pairs, it is no help at all; the board pair is everybody's pair. We have no kicker because the four won't play in a showdown, and so we must check once more. Again, we are prepared to throw the hand away.

If we happened to get a four on the turn to help our pair of aces, we could probably bet, depending on who the opponents are, but it would require some caution.

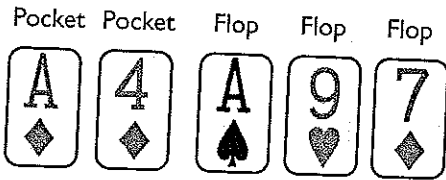
In other words, it's nice to be active, but we can't get excited about ace-junk. It nearly always places us on the defensive.

### POSITION PLAY

Now let's change positions.

We're on the button. Same hand, ace-four suited. We wanted to really show some action, so we have raised the two limpers and the blinds. We have three callers. They've called because they aren't used to us winning a hand and it's the perfect place for us to steal the

blinds. Their calls are born of suspicion. We get the same flop.



If one of the opponents bets, we can't call. Our hand is mucked.

If the action is checked to us, we can bet unless one of the players is known for slow-playing hands. If there is a "slow" player in the pot, we might want to check along so we can see what he'll do after the turn. Also, besides not taking a risk with our weak hand, our failing to bet helps disguise our pair of aces.

But, still, if the action is checked to us and we bet, we could take the pot. So, to make this decision, we have to play our players. If we do bet and we are check-raised, we have to throw the hand away. The reason to muck is, of course, a bigger ace could be out there and wasn't deemed big enough for a raise or reraise before the flop. (A big slick check-raise is common and a good play, one

we often use, and one we are sometimes victim to.) So, after the check and raise, we end up with another instance of throwing our hand away. Please note that this time it was expensive with the preflop raise and our bet after the flop.

If the hand somehow continues, watch out for the straight. Because there are several players, one of whom probably has a better kicker with his ace than we do. We can't protect ourselves against the straight by betting. And another fine mess you've gotten us into, Ollie.

Conclusion: The weak ace will generally either win us a small pot with an unusual flop or, more often, place us on the defensive with a bad - or not so good - flop and an eventual loss.

In other words, all the ace-junk does for us is complicate the hand. It is not an aggressor's hand and it doesn't belong to the good player as a value pocket. The hand is intended mostly for the inexperienced player so he can lose his stack to us and explain how unlucky he is.

#### SHOULD WE EVER PLAY IT?

Here's a common error. Ollie is near


the button. There are enough limpers to call it a family pot. Ollie has ace-nine, so he limps in with the others - he likes the odds.

Now, with seven players, where does Ollie think the other aces are? Even if an ace is in the flop, he likely does not have the best ace of the bunch. Ollie is now hoisted on his own limper petard.

On those occasions when we have to play ace-nothing, we'll try to play it heads-up or three-way. Being on or near the button will give us more of a chance. We will elect to play it sometimes near the button for the sake of playing. But we won't get pushy about it and we'll plan on throwing it away. We just wanted to be active and to see if we could be lucky.

Usually, when the ace-garbage hand wins, it is a suited hand that makes a flush. And that, friends, is how unusual a winning hand it is. ♠

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