

Inside POKER

By Steve Rosenbloom

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Winning poker is all about making the right decisions, and many times the right decision is to play aggressively to take control of a hand and allow opponents to make bad decisions. But sometimes even the best players blow it.

During a no-limit hold'em tournament at the 2005 WSOP, "Miami" John Cernuto, a long time pro with several WSOP bracelets, held KJ of spades and limped into the pot behind a player he had never seen before who had limped from first position. The two blinds also limped.

John Cernuto's Hand:

2nd Position



The Flop:



The flop came J-6-5, two diamonds, giving Cernuto top pair/good kicker. The new player in first position bet. "Now I'm in a dilemma, because if I come over the top, I'm going to get committed to this hand, and you're not supposed to get broken in an unraised pot.," Cernuto says. "I have to see what the two blinds do. They might have jacks up, they might have two pair."

So, at a point where he could raise to define his hand, Cernuto said he felt frozen because he didn't know how strong the blinds were. So he just called. The blinds folded. "I like that," Cernuto said. Now I'm dealing with this new gentleman. He could have a diamond draw, or he could have two aces because he came in from first position. The turn is the queen of clubs.

The Turn:



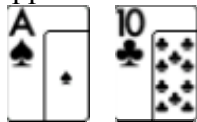
"I'm frozen again, because he could have a queen high flush draw or a pair of queens to my jacks," said Cernuto, who chose to call the first position player's bet. "So I have to call down and hope he checks it on the end. The last card is good for me – a king of hearts.

The River:



He says, 'I'm all in'. I say, 'All right, I've got him read. He doesn't have anything. He has a busted flush draw. I called and turned over kings and jacks. He turns over:

Opponents Hand:



for a Broadway straight. So, he was bluffing, and he was bluffing again, and then he wasn't bluffing anymore, but by that time it was too late because I made my hand."

Because he hadn't seen the person in first position play, Cernuto was unsure whether he was the kind of player who chases straights and flushes, or whether he would play only big hands. By just calling, he let the player in first position drive the action without forcing him into a decision that might define each of their hands.

"If I'd have raised him at any point in the hand, I'd have probably won the hand," Cernuto admitted.