

Starting from Zero

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I'm almost a year into an experiment on Full Tilt Poker. I'm attempting to turn [\\$0 into a \\$10,000 bankroll](#). With no money to start with, I had no choice but to start out playing Freerolls. Starting out, I'd often manage to win a dollar or two, but I'd quickly get busted and have to start over again. It took some time but, after awhile, I was eventually able to graduate to games that required an actual buy-in.

Even today, people don't believe it's really me when I sit down at Full Tilt's small stakes games. They ask what I'm doing down here, and often tell me stories about how they turned [\\$5 into \\$500](#) or [\\$100 into \\$1,000](#). Usually, these stories end with the person telling me that they went broke. There's no surprise there. These folks tried to quickly build a bankroll by gambling. They'd play in a game that was beyond their bankroll and, if they happened to win, they'd move up to a higher limit and risk it all one more time. Inevitably, they'd lose a few big hands and go broke.

For me, this experiment isn't about the money. It's about showing how, with proper bankroll management, you can start from nothing and move up to the point where you're playing in some pretty big games. I know it's possible because I did it once before, turning \$1 into \$20,000.

To ensure that I keep my bankroll intact, I've adopted some key rules:

- I'll never buy into a cash game or a Sit & Go with more than 5 percent of my total bankroll (there is an exception for the lowest limits: I'm allowed to buy into any game with a buy-in of \$2.50 or less).
- I won't buy into a multi-table tournament for more than 2 percent of my total bankroll and I'm allowed to buy into any multi-table tournament that costs \$1.
- If at any time during a No-Limit or Pot-Limit cash-game session the money on the table represents more than 10 percent of my total bankroll, I must leave the game when the blinds reach me.

I think a lot of players would do well to apply these rules. One great benefit from this approach to bankroll management is that it ensures you'll be playing in games you can afford. You'll never play for very long in a game that's over your head because, when you're losing, you'll have no choice but to drop down to a smaller game. You can continue to sharpen your game at that lower limit until your bankroll allows you to move up and take another shot. These rules also prevent you from being completely decimated by a bad run of cards.

Dropping down and playing lower limits is difficult for a lot of players. They view it as a failure and their egos get in the way. Many want to remain at the level they'd been playing and win back their losses. But this can lead to some pretty severe tilt - and that can go through a bankroll in a hurry. I know that dropping down was difficult for me in my run from \$1 to \$20,000. When I first played in the \$25/\$50 game, I lost. Sticking to my rules, I dropped down to the \$10/\$25 game. I had a losing streak there and had to go down to \$5/\$10. That was tough. After playing \$25/\$50, a \$5/\$10 game was boring to me.

But I had the discipline to stick to my rules, and that motivated me to play better at the lower levels. I really didn't want to lose any more because I knew the consequences: I'd have to play

even lower and work even harder to get back to where I'd been, which could take as long as a month. If you ever find yourself bored or frustrated playing at the lower limits, you're obviously not playing well. Take a break from the game. Often, stepping away can give you a fresh perspective and heightened motivation to play well when you return.

There are a couple of more tips I'd like to share regarding bankroll management. First, you should never play in a game that is beyond your bankroll simply because the game seems to be soft that day. It's never soft enough to risk money that puts your bankroll in jeopardy. The other point is that you should avoid playing in games that are at the top of your bankroll limits, when a lower game offers more opportunity for profit.

I'm confident that by sticking to these sound bankroll management rules, I'll make it to my [\\$10,000 goal](#). These rules are sure to help you as well, as you pursue your own poker ambitions. So, if you want to start your own quest - or play against me while I'm continuing with mine - come open a free account at Full Tilt Poker and look for me online. But hurry, because I'm hoping I won't be in the lower limits for too much longer.