

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) About Oresteen's Poker Rules

I thought that "The Wheel" (A 2 3 4 5) is the best low hand and that straights & flushes don't count in Lowball? Your rules state that the 6-4 (Ace to Six - A 2 3 4 6 unsuited) is the best low and that straights & flushes do count in Lowball. Why?

Good question. The "California Wheel" (A - 5) is used in most casinos and cards rooms as the best low with straights & flushes ignored. Five Card Draw played low is known as "California Lowball" when the California Wheel is used. There are four major methods of ranking low poker hands:

1. A-5 flushes & straights do not count Aces are high or low – California Wheel
2. A to 6 (64) flushes & straights do count, Aces are high or low – Chicago Wheel Ace to Six mixed suit
3. 2 to 7 flushes & straights do count, Ace is high only – Kansas City Lowball Duce to Seven
4. 2 to 6 flushes & straights do not count Ace is high only

There are two very good reasons *not* to use the California Wheel in *home* games where Dealer's Choice is played. First, in Dealer's Choice home games, the game can change with every deal. It becomes very confusing for novice & beginning poker players to understand that straights & flushes count in one hand but not in the next. In a casino however, only *one* game is played at a table so the ranking rules **NEVER** change *at that table*. A Dealer's Choice game allows the particular *game* to change with every deal but the hand ranking rules should *never* change. A consistent set of ranking rules is needed that covers **ALL** allowable games. Using the Ace to Six Chicago Wheel as the best low provides ranking uniformity and order in Dealer's Choice games. Your guests will appreciate it. Secondly, it is mathematically sound to have the 6-4 mixed suit as the best low. Lowball was intended to make the no-pair hands winners and high hand losers. Breaking down the possible 5 card hand distributions, there are 2,598,960 possible poker hands with no wild cards and ranking the ace high or low:

Straight Flush	40	
Four of A Kind	624	
Full House	3,744	
Flush	5,108	
Straight	10,200	
Three of a Kind	54,912	
Two Pair	123,552	
One Pair	1,098,240	Total High Hands: 1,296,420
No Pair (Low Hands)	1,302,540	
Grand Total Poker Hands	2,598,960	

As you can see, the no pair hands make up 50% of the possible poker hands. If you are trying to find the lowest hand of ALL the possible No Pair poker hands, it is clear that straights & flushes have already been accounted for in the 50% that contains the high hands. So from a strict probability standpoint, straights & flushes have been counted as high hands, not as low hands. Thus, they can't be ignored in Lowball. Ace to Six Lowball is very similar to **Duce to Seven Lowball** (aka **Kansas City Lowball**). In Duce to Seven, aces are always high, suits and flushes do count. Since we have defined the ace to be high or low, the Ace to Six (6-4) is the best low and is consistent in ranking with all the other games that are permitted. Ace to Six is often used in Europe and London Lowball is Razz played with the Ace to Six as the best low.

What is a BUG? Why is it called a "Bug"??

The Bug is a semi-wild card that hurts you as often as it helps you. One of the joker cards is added to the deck as the Bug. It's called a Bug because the Joker card from a Bee type poker deck (US Playing Card Co.) has a jester standing on the back of a large bee, thus the term "Bug". Bee decks were (and still are) popular with poker players. The Bug pairs with an ace, fills a flush, or fills a straight. By itself the Bug is an ace. Highest hand becomes 5 aces. Natural aces *do not* rank higher or lower than a Bug. It's a way to limit the use of wild cards yet loosen things up a bit. The Bug can help a lot in games with 5 or less players. Tradition has it that the Bug originated in the California card rooms to liven up 5 Card Draw when stud games were not allowed to be played by California laws first passed in the 1870's.

Why do you use a “Dealer Button”? Why not just let each person deal and let it go at that?

In draw games (and common card games like Hold ‘Em) the player who bets last (normally the player dealing) has a *huge* advantage. By using a moving Dealer Button every one gets a fair chance at betting last. It’s what the casinos do when using a professional dealer so that all players get a fair chance at being the last bettor.

Why don’t you allow wild cards, Baseball, Pass-The-Trash, No-Peek, Roll Your Own, etc. type games? I’ve played them before and they seemed like fun.

For the same reason that casinos don’t allow them. The games are not mathematically fair and are very hard to control. There are a lot of regional variations in these wild games, which may cause friction between your guests if you allow wild Dealer’s Choice games.

As a host, you have the responsibility to maintain a fair and controlled environment for your guests. Wild card games makes that hard to do. These rules allow for all of the poker game types played in the World Series of Poker tournament; none of the wild card games mentioned are ever played in that annual event. Take it from the pros and stick to the main casino games. In the long run you will develop better poker skills by avoiding the wild “trash” games and sticking to the standard games. This will help you a lot when you decide to play in a casino or card room where the competition is a lot tougher.

There are some “wild” variations in the 19 permitted games. Some die-hard poker traditionalists would not allow Pineapple, Wild Pineapple, Aviation, and the use of the Bug. All of these games are played in some casinos and they do loosen up a home game enough to satisfy most guests yet do not significantly alter the Laws of Poker.

Why is Chicago 9 played instead of Omaha 8 (and Seven Card Stud 9)?

Since the best low is a Chicago Wheel (Ace to Six 6-4) instead of the California Wheel (Ace to Five 5-4), and flushes & straights do count, there would be far less possible low hands if Omaha 8 were played with the Ace to Six as the best low. To make up for the ‘missing low hands’ (straights & flushes), 9 lows are allowed to play for low. Thus the *total* number of hands eligible for the low remains about the same keeping the game essentially the same. The name is changed to Chicago 9 to prevent confusion with the casino game.

Why is Klondike (6 Card Stud) & Sixty Four played? I’ve never heard of them.

It’s true that 6 Card Stud is not very well known today but it does have a long history as a poker game. It evolved from 5 card stud and was called Klondike (not to be confused with the popular solitaire game of the same name). It was designed to get extra cards into the hands and to increase the probability of better hands. Soon 6 Card Stud evolved into 7 Card Stud which is far more popular today than 6 Card Stud is. It is a difficult game to master and when played high/low can create huge pots. With eight players you can run out of cards playing 7 Card Stud. With 6 Card Stud you will always have enough cards for everyone. That’s why it’s included in the permitted game list. Give it a try and you will find it far more complex than it seems to be at first.

Six Card Stud Hands

Hand	Combinations	Probabilities
Royal flush	188	0.000009
Straight flush	1,656	0.000081
Four of a kind	14,664	0.000720
Full house	165,984	0.008153
Flush	205,792	0.010108
Straight	361,620	0.017763
Three of a kind	732,160	0.035963
Two pair	2,532,816	0.124411
Pair	9,730,740	0.477969
No Pair	6,612,900	0.324822
Total	20,358,520	