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# Know When to Hold 'Em

World Poker Tour Champion and busy mom Courtney Hopper offers tips on poker... and life.

BY MINDY CHARSKI

**C**COURTNEY HOPPER IS NOT ONLY A BUSY MOM, SHE'S also a horse trainer and the manager of her family's business, Hopper Ranch, in Aubrey, Texas. On top of all of that, she also found time to become a poker champion.

The 29-year-old, who has been playing the card game for the last nine years, took home the top spot in the Ladies \$125 No Limit Hold 'Em event during last summer's World Poker Tour.

Hopper offered us some tips for success that can apply both at and away from the poker table...

**Be confident in your abilities.**

"People say it's impossible to win all your money back playing tournaments, but I love tournaments — they're my passion," she says. "It's an ongoing joke with my friends that when we enter a poker tournament, we stand up and look across the room so we can see all the chips we have to win."

**Be patient.**

"I train horses, so I'm pretty patient when it comes to animals, but poker has definitely taught me to be a lot more patient. The days I am not being patient are the days I lose."

**Learn how to read people.**

Hopper has discovered tricks for reading people. "If someone is talking really fast or a whole lot during the hand, that usually means they want you to fold. They don't have a good hand. If you can see their heart beating in the side of their neck and real shaky hands, usually it means they have a good hand."



**Breathe deep.**

Hopper has found a consistent way to control her own body language. After she's dealt her two hole cards, she slowly looks at them individually and takes a deep breath. "It keeps me level," she says, "It reminds me to breathe, and that way I'm not giving off any signs with my breathing."

**Combine luck and skill.**

Hopper has advantages that make her a strong player: "Poker is a game of math, so being really good at math is helpful." But even though she sees it as a game of skill, she doesn't hesitate to try to generate a little luck by wearing the same pair of clean black socks and camouflage slippers every time she plays. They were, of course, on her feet when she won the event last year. One last piece of advice: Never judge a poker player by her footwear.

Photo by John Sutton/Sutton Pictures