

Ace high can win at showdown. It can also be a losing hand that looks tempting because it contains an ace. The difference comes down to what your opponent can hold, what the board shows, and whether you reach showdown or make a better hand fold first.



That distinction is central to **aggressive bluffing poker**—and to the stories told about **Tom Dwan in 2008**, when his fearless online style and televised high-stakes play made him a prominent figure in poker. But a useful lesson is not to treat every dramatic Dwan hand as proof that ace high is a strong showdown hand. A bluff wins when the opponent folds; a showdown win means the cards were best when revealed. Those are different outcomes.

What an Ace-High Bluff Story Actually Teaches

Tom “durrrr” Dwan became known for putting pressure on opponents with large bets, including situations where his hand was weak or had missed its draw. The memorable part of a bluff is often the final bet and the fold it produces—not whether the bluffer would have won if the cards were turned over. Some retellings blur that distinction, or attach an exact hand to a general story without enough reliable detail to verify it.

So here’s the practical version of the “ace-high bluff” lesson: an ace-high hand can win in two ways. It can be the best hand at showdown, or it can make a better hand fold. If you’re reviewing a specific Tom Dwan hand, check the full board and the cards that were actually shown before calling it an ace-high showdown win. A hand that wins because an opponent folds is a successful bluff, not evidence that ace high beat the opponent’s cards.

In Texas Hold’em, each player combines their two private cards with the five community cards to make the best five-card hand. You may use both hole cards, one, or neither. If the board itself makes the best five-card hand for everyone still in the pot, players can split it. The goal is always to make—or represent—a hand that beats the other player’s best five cards.

Texas Hold’em Hand Rankings: Where Ace High Fits

Ace high is not a named made-hand category above a pair. It is a high-card hand: five cards that do not form a pair or a stronger combination. When no player has a pair or better, the highest card is compared first, followed by

the next-highest card, and so on. Those comparison cards are called kickers.

For example, if your best hand is A-K-9-6-3 and your opponent's is A-Q-9-6-3, your king kicker beats their queen kicker. But if the opponent pairs their queen, your ace-high hand loses to a pair of queens. The ace does not automatically make your hand a winner.

Rank Hand Example 1Royal flushA-K-Q-J-10, all one suit 2Straight flush9-8-7-6-5, all one suit 3Four of a kindFour queens 4Full houseThree jacks and two fours 5FlushFive cards of the same suit, not in sequence 6StraightFive consecutive ranks, mixed suits allowed 7Three of a kindThree sevens 8Two pairTwo aces and two fives 9One pairTwo kings 10High cardAce high with no pair or better

Suits have no ranking in standard Texas Hold'em. A spade flush does not beat a heart flush just because of its suit. If both players have a flush, compare the ranks of the five cards in that flush.

When Can Ace High Win at Showdown?

Ace high can win when the opponent has a lower high-card hand or has missed a draw. It can also win when the board is paired or connected but neither player improves, depending on the exact five-card hands. The key is to compare the [how to read equity chart](#) best five cards, not just the two hole cards.



- **Example:** You hold A-K on a board of 9-7-4-2-J, with no flush possible. If your opponent has Q-10 and also misses, your ace-high hand wins. Your king is the next kicker.
- **Kicker check:** If you hold A-8 and your opponent holds A-9 on a board where neither of you makes a pair, both have ace high—but their nine kicker beats your eight.
- **Pair beats high card:** If your opponent has a pair of fours and you still have ace high, their pair wins, even if your ace is the highest single card.

A good showdown check is simple: write down each player's best five-card hand, then compare them from the top. If you have ace high and villain has a pair, you lose. If villain also has ace high, compare kickers. If you cannot beat the likely hands that call your bet, your ace may be better as a bluff candidate than as a value bet—but only if the betting story and opponent make a fold plausible.

Aggressive Bluffing Poker: The Fold Is the Point

A bluff does not need to be the best hand at showdown. It needs to make enough better hands fold to justify its cost. That is why an ace-high hand can sometimes be a useful bluff: it may have little showdown value, but it can block some strong combinations your opponent could hold. A blocker is a card in your hand that reduces the number of possible opponent hands containing that card.

Still, “I have an ace” is not a reason to fire. Consider the board, your position, the preflop action, the opponent’s likely range, and the size of the pot. A large river bet needs to work often enough to cover its price. As a basic break-even calculation, if the pot is \$100 and you bet \$100, your bluff risks \$100 to win the \$100 already in the pot. Ignoring other factors, it needs to get a fold more than 50% of the time to show a profit: \$100 risk divided by \$200 total pot after your bet.

That estimate assumes your hand has no chance of winning when called. If ace high sometimes wins at showdown, that extra equity can improve the decision. Conversely, if your opponent rarely folds or has reached the river with many strong hands, a bluff may be burning money. Dwan’s aggressive reputation is a prompt to study pressure and ranges—not a license to copy large bets without a reason.

Hand Odds and Probabilities: Read the Assumptions

Odds depend on what cards are known and which definition of a hand you’re using. A five-card poker hand and a seven-card Hold’em hand do not have the same four-of-a-kind frequency. Always check the sample size behind a probability before using it.

Example	Approximate probability	What it means
Four of a kind in a five-card hand	0.0240% (1 in 4,164); also stated as about 1 in 4,165	The tiny difference is rounding. The exact frequency is about 0.02401%, or 1 in 4,165.
Four of a kind among seven cards	About 0.168%, or 1 in 595	Seven-card odds are not the same as five-card odds.
Flopping a set with a pocket pair	About 11.8%, or 1 in 8.5	Assumes you see all three flop cards.

The four-of-a-kind example is a good reminder that numbers need context. The five-card figure counts possible five-card combinations; the seven-card figure asks whether the best five cards from seven contain four of a kind. Neither number tells you the chance of making quads from a particular flop without accounting for your cards and the board.

Draw Odds by Flop, Turn, and River

A draw is not a made hand. A flush draw means you need another card of the same suit to complete a flush; a straight draw means you need a rank that completes a sequence. They are not interchangeable, and suits do not have different strength. For a typical flush draw with nine outs, the chance to hit by the river is roughly 35% when you see both remaining cards. If you miss the turn, the chance to hit on the river is about 19.6%.

Draw situation	Chance on next card	Chance by river from flop
9 outs, such as a typical flush draw	About 19.1% on the turn (9 of 47)	About 35.0% by river
8 outs, such as an open-ended straight draw	About 17.0% on the turn (8 of 47)	About 31.5% by river
4 outs, such as a gutshot straight draw	About 8.5% on the turn (4 of 47)	About 16.5% by river

These are standard estimates assuming you can see the cards and all counted outs really help. “Outs” are unseen cards that improve you to a hand you expect to win. Some outs are dirty: they complete your hand but also give your opponent a better one. For example, a card that makes your straight might also complete an opponent’s flush. Do not count that card as a guaranteed winner.

From the turn, you have one card to come, so the calculation changes. With nine clean outs and 46 unseen cards, the river completes the draw about 19.6% of the time. This is why “about 2% per out” is only a shortcut, not an

exact rule—especially when you have multiple cards to come or some outs are not clean.

Use Cheat Sheets and Equity Charts as Training Wheels

Printable cheat sheets can help beginners remember hand rankings, common draw odds, and the order of betting actions without stopping every hand to look up a rule. A compact chart is useful during a home game, but do not let it make decisions for you. It cannot know the opponent's range, the pot size, or whether your outs are clean.

Equity charts show how often one hand or range is expected to win against another, usually including the chance to split the pot. They are useful for comparing, for instance, ace-high against a pair on a particular board. But equity is not the same as a guarantee: a hand with 35% equity loses most individual runouts, even if it is a reasonable call at the right price.

1. Identify the best five-card hand you currently have.
2. If you are drawing, count clean outs and estimate the chance to hit by the next card or river.
3. Compare your equity with the price you are being offered by the pot.
4. When considering a bluff, ask which better hands can realistically fold.
5. At showdown, compare kickers whenever both players have the same hand category—or both have high card.

The Takeaway: Ace High Can Win, but It Is Not Magic

Yes, an **ace high wins pot** when it is the best five-card hand at showdown, or when a bet makes the opponent fold. Those are separate routes to winning. A strong bluff story—whether inspired by Tom Dwan in 2008 or a lower-stakes hand at your own table—should be judged by its situation and result, not by a dramatic label.

Before calling with ace high, ask: if villain has a pair and you have only ace high, can you beat that hand? No. If villain has ace high too, which kicker wins? If you are betting, what better hands fold? Keep the rankings straight, use odds with their assumptions attached, and remember that a flush draw is not a straight draw. That small discipline will save more chips than trying to imitate a famous bluff without knowing why it worked.