

Chapter 15 — Live Poker at Encore Boston Harbor

Chapter 9 — The 1/3 Game: What's Different, What's the Same, and How to Beat It

Purpose: Prepare you to transition from online or sweepstakes play to live 1/3 NL at Encore Boston Harbor in Everett, MA. This chapter covers the structural realities of the room, the player pool, the adjustments required, and the mindset needed to profit despite the highest rake of any major poker room in New England.

9.1 Know What You're Walking Into

Encore Boston Harbor runs a 24-hour poker room on the Mezzanine Level (The Loft, second floor). It has 24 tables, shufflers on every table, USB charging at every seat, and complimentary drinks while playing. The room is well-run physically and staffed with experienced dealers. It is also one of the most aggressively raked poker rooms in the country.

The rake structure at 1/3 NL is 10% up to \$10 per pot, plus an additional \$2 promotional drop (bad beat jackpot + high hand promos) taken from every raked pot. That is \$12 taken from a single pot before you've won a dollar. For context: most major online sites rake 4–5% up to \$3. Encore charges more than double the rake cap of PokerStars on every single hand that goes to showdown.

The Real Cost of Rake at 1/3 Encore

At approximately 25–30 hands per hour in a live game, with \$12 extracted from most contested pots, the rake roughly costs each player at a 9-handed table about \$13–15 per hour just to sit. That is before a single bad decision. You need a significant edge over the player pool to overcome this structural tax and show profit. The good news: you can have that edge. The player pool at 1/3 Encore is soft enough that winning players do beat the game consistently. But you must respect the rake — it changes optimal strategy in ways this chapter addresses.

9.2 The Buy-In Structure and Stack Dynamics

The 1/3 NL game at Encore has a \$500 maximum buy-in. This is unusual for 1/3 anywhere — most rooms cap it at \$200–\$300. The result is that the effective stacks at Encore play much deeper relative to the blinds than a typical 1/3 game. Pots get large fast. Preflop raises of \$15–\$25 are common. Seeing a flop for under \$15 on weekends is rare.

What this means for you:

- Always buy in for the maximum (\$500). Short-stacking at 1/3 kills your implied odds and makes you exploitable.
- With 165 BB effective stacks (two \$500 players), the game has legitimate deep-stack dynamics. SPR awareness matters more than in a typical 100 BB game.

- Opponents who open to \$15–\$20 preflop are not maniacs — that is the adjusted sizing for a \$500 max buy-in table. Calibrate accordingly.
- Recreational players will routinely overbet. They are not polarized — they are just gambling. Do not hero call assuming they are bluffing.

9.3 The Player Pool — What You Will Actually See

Encore's 1/3 game draws a mix of Boston-area recreational players, casino tourists, and a layer of regulars who play multiple sessions per week. On weekends, the recreational pool deepens significantly. The player archetypes from Chapter 7 apply directly here, but with live-specific flavors:

Player Type | How to Spot Them Live | Primary Exploit |

Weekend Recreational | Drinks in hand, talking to neighbors, not tracking action | Value bet mercilessly. Never bluff. Size up for value. |

Loose-Passive Caller | Calls every preflop raise, checks most flops, calls two streets | Max thin value. Eliminate bluffs entirely. Three-street value is available. |

Aggro Reg | Three-bets frequently, barrels multiple streets, talks strategy | Trap with strong hands. Do not bluff-catch light. Let them bluff into you. |

Nit Reg | Sits for hours, plays very few hands, folds to most c-bets | Steal blinds, attack their limps, fold to their aggression. |

Tilted Whale | Rebought multiple times, muttering, playing fast | Tighten up and wait for a strong hand. Let them donate. Do not gamble with them. |

9.4 The Biggest Structural Difference: Pace and Information

Online, you play 60–80 hands per hour. At Encore's 1/3 tables, you play 25–30 hands per hour. This is not a minor difference — it completely changes what patience means. Online, folding for 20 minutes is normal. Live, folding for 20 minutes means you have played 8–10 hands and seen very little. This creates a psychological pressure to play more hands than you should. Resist it.

The slower pace also gives you something online cannot: physical information. Live tells are real, especially at recreational stakes. They are not as reliable as hand-reading, but they add weight to decisions at the margins:

- Shaking hands: At low stakes, shaking hands almost always means a strong hand — excitement, not fear. Do not call a big bet into shaking hands without the nuts or near-nuts.
- Immediate calls: A call made without hesitation on a wet board usually indicates a draw or marginal made hand — not a monster. Monsters pause to think about raises.
- Sudden stillness: A player who was animated and goes quiet after a flop is often strong. Stillness is a common attempt to avoid giving away a big hand.
- Bet timing: Instant bets on the river often represent strong hands or pure air — rarely medium-strength. Medium-strength players usually pause.

- Glancing at chips: After seeing a flop or turn card, a quick glance at their own chips often signals a player who wants to bet — they likely connected or improved.

Do not over-rely on tells. Tells are supplemental, not foundational. A solid read on someone's range based on betting patterns beats a gut feeling about their posture every time. Use physical information to break ties and confirm reads — not to override logic.

9.5 Live-Specific Preflop Adjustments

Your online RFI ranges are a solid foundation, but live 1/3 at Encore requires specific calibrations:

Limping exists and you must account for it. Online, limping is rare at competent tables. Live, limping is constant. Entire tables will limp around. This changes the math on isolation raises and squeeze plays significantly.

- Isolation raises over limpers: Raise to \$15–\$20 over 1–2 limpers with your standard opening hands. Raise to \$20–\$25 over 3+ limpers. You want to thin the field, not invite a multiway pot.
- Do not limp yourself. Even in spots where online players might complete from the SB, live limping with a weak range in a game where half the table calls destroys your ability to play postflop profitably. Open or fold.
- Tighten slightly in early position. With \$500 stacks and multiple callers common, speculative hands in early position face difficult multiway spots. Stick close to your online UTG/HJ ranges.
- 3-betting live: Live players are more likely to give 3-bets credit than online players. Your 3-bet bluffs work at a higher frequency. However, when they do call or 4-bet, they usually have it — tighten your 4-bet calling range.
- Straddles: Encore allows straddles (\$6 under the gun). When there is a straddle, pot odds shift and effective stack depth decreases. Tighten your calling range. Do not defend wide from the blinds against a straddle as you would against a standard raise.

9.6 Live Postflop: The Three Adjustments That Matter Most

1. Value bet thicker and more often. The single biggest leak you will observe at live 1/3 is players failing to extract value. Recreational players call too much and fold too little on the river. If you have top pair with a decent kicker on a dry board, bet three streets at sizes villain can call. The calling station exploit from Chapter 7 is the primary live strategy — not balance, not bluffing frequency, not GTO. Find the weakest player at the table and extract value from them on every hand you play against them.

2. Bluff far less than online. Online micro-stakes pools fold too much. Live 1/3 pools call too much. This is one of the most important adjustments you can make. The bluff frequency that prints online will light money on fire at Encore. River bluffs should be rare and targeted only at players you have specifically identified as capable of folding. Against most recreational players, do not bluff the river — period.

3. Multiway pots are the norm, not the exception. Online 6-max, most pots go heads-up or three-way at most. Live 1/3 at Encore regularly produces 4–6 way pots. Your Chapter 9 multiway adjustments

are not theoretical here — they are the baseline. Check more, bluff less, and only build big pots when you have strong equity.

9.7 Bet Sizing at Live 1/3

Online sizing conventions translate reasonably well, with one major difference: bigger sizing works better live. Recreational players are not responding to small bets by calling and folding to big bets — they call based on hand strength, not pot odds. This means:

- Value bet 60–75% pot rather than 33% on dry boards. They will call either way. Take more chips.
- On wet boards where you want protection, bet 66–100% pot. Charging draws full price matters more live because opponents do not understand implied odds calculations.
- River value bets can go large — 75–100% pot — against calling stations. They will not fold weak top pair regardless of sizing. You are leaving money behind by betting small.
- Do not min-bet or limp-check your way through strong hands hoping to induce. Live players do not bluff into you enough to make that profitable.

9.8 The High Hand Promotion — Use It, Don't Chase It

Encore runs high hand promotions throughout the day — typically \$300 every 20 minutes during lower-traffic hours and \$500 every 30 minutes during peak hours. These are real EV additions to the game if you happen to hit a qualifying hand. They are not a reason to deviate from fundamental strategy.

High Hand Reality Check: The promotion pays out roughly every 20–30 minutes, split across all running tables. Your probability of hitting any given high hand in a given window is low. Never slow-play a strong hand hoping to win the promo — you will lose more in EV from giving free cards than the promo is worth. Play your strong hands to extract maximum value. If you win the high hand while doing that, great.

9.9 Beating the Rake — The Strategic Imperative

The rake at Encore is a real obstacle. At \$12 per pot, you need a genuine, significant edge over the player pool to profit. The grinders who complain loudest about the rake are usually the ones trying to grind edges against other regs. That is the wrong approach. The path through the rake is exploiting the recreational players hard enough that the rake becomes a manageable tax rather than a barrier.

Concrete rake-beating adjustments:

- Avoid small pots. A \$30 pot that gets raked \$3 is 10% of the pot gone before you win. Play for larger pots where the rake cap (\$10) represents a smaller percentage of your win.
- Win large pots, not many pots. Your winrate at Encore is built on stacking recreational players occasionally, not grinding small edges in marginal spots. One \$400 pot beats ten \$30 pots after rake is factored.

- Do not battle regs for thin edges. Reg vs. reg pots are rake-intensive and edge-thin. Let the regs fight each other. Focus on the money moving from recreational players to you.
- Table selection matters enormously. The best strategic decision you can make at Encore is choosing the right table. If you see a table with multiple recreational players buying in short or rebounding, get on that list. If your current table has tightened to five regs, ask for a table change.

9.10 Bankroll Requirements for Live 1/3

Live 1/3 variance is higher than online NL10 despite the softer player pool. The larger SPR, multiway pots, and \$500 max buy-in create bigger swings. Plan accordingly.

Goal | Minimum Bankroll | Notes |

Occasional shot / recreational | \$1,000–\$1,500 | 2–3 buy-ins. Treat it as a recreational expense if you lose it. |

Serious semi-regular play | \$3,000–\$4,000 | 6–8 buy-ins. Enough to survive a downswing without going broke. |

Full grind / building a roll | \$6,000–\$7,500 | 12–15 buy-ins minimum. Live variance is real. Do not underestimate it. |

The 20 buy-in rule from online bankroll management applies to live as well, with the caveat that each buy-in is \$500 rather than \$10. You are not ready to grind live 1/3 seriously with \$2,000 in your pocket. That is four buy-ins — one bad session wipes it. Build the online roll first, let it compound, and make the live shots when the bankroll can absorb variance.

9.11 Live Table Etiquette and Logistics

First time at Encore or any casino poker room, the logistics can feel unfamiliar. Here is what to know before you sit down:

Getting a seat: Encore uses PokerAtlas for remote sign-up. You can add your name to the 1/3 list from your phone before you arrive. When you get there, check in at the podium or use the self check-in kiosks. Wait time on weekends can be 30–90 minutes for 1/3 — plan ahead.

Buying chips: Encore has had issues with the cage location — chips are sometimes bought downstairs rather than in the room. Confirm with the floor when you sit. Rebuys mid-session are handled at the table by a chip runner.

Tipping: Standard tipping is \$1 per pot won, sometimes \$2 on larger pots. This is not optional — it is the dealer's income. Factor tipping into your hourly cost. At 25 hands per hour and \$1 per pot won, you might tip \$8–\$12 per hour depending on how many pots you take down. Budget for it.

Acting in turn: Live poker has strict acting-in-turn rules. Do not announce your action before it is your turn — it gives information to players between you and the action. Wait. Watch. Then act.

Verbal declarations: In live poker, verbal declarations of action are binding. If you say "raise," you must raise. If you say "call," you must call. Be deliberate before speaking.

String bets: A string bet is making a bet in multiple motions without declaring a raise first. It is illegal. Always put your full bet or raise amount into the pot in a single forward motion, or verbally declare "raise to [amount]" before reaching for more chips.

Showing cards: You are not obligated to show your cards when winning uncontested pots. Showing gives away information about your ranges. Default to not showing unless there is a specific reason (high hand promo, building table image intentionally).

9.12 Session Management at a Live Casino

Live sessions at a casino carry risks that online sessions do not. The environment is engineered to keep you there — free drinks, no clocks, comfortable seats, constant action around you. Discipline requires active defense of your session structure.

- Set a hard time limit before you sit. "I'm playing until midnight" is a real plan. "I'll see how I feel" is not. Long sessions cause fatigue-based mistakes that compound quickly.
- Do not drink alcohol and play seriously. Free drinks are a rake subsidy Encore is happy to offer you. Alcohol degrades decision-making. If you are playing with profit intent, drink water.
- The stop-loss rule applies live. Two buy-ins down in a session is the hard stop. If you have lost \$1,000 ($\500×2), you leave. Not one more buy-in "to get even." Leave.
- Walk away a winner when you are up significantly. There is no rule that says a winning session must continue. If you are up \$400 and the game is breaking up, leaving is not weak — it is disciplined.
- Avoid the casino floor on the way out. Table games, slots, and sports betting are designed to take back everything you won at poker. Walk directly to the exit. The parking garage is on the north side of the casino — use the elevator directly to the Mezzanine so you do not have to walk the floor at all.

9.13 The Path: Online to Live

The progression that makes sense for your situation:

Stage | Where | Goal | Signal to Advance |

1 — Now | Sweepstakes (WPT Gold / Clubs) | Build fundamentals, memorize ranges, pass quizzes | Consistent results + Move-Up Test passed |

2 — When Ready | Encore 1/3 shots (\$1,000–\$1,500 bankroll) | Acclimate to live play, apply live adjustments | +EV results over 20+ sessions |

3 — iGaming Launch | MA regulated online (est. 2027+) | NL10 → NL25 grind with HUD and hand history | 50K hand sample, positive winrate |

4 — Long Term | Online NL25–NL50 + Encore 1/3 simultaneously | Two revenue streams, different variance profiles | Bankroll supports both without stress |

The honest bottom line on live 1/3 at Encore: The rake is punishing and the grinders are right that it is too high. But the recreational player pool — especially on weekends — is soft enough that a

disciplined, fundamentals-first player with good table selection and a value-heavy strategy can beat the game. Your edge will not come from fancy plays or GTO balance. It will come from playing straightforward, patient poker against people who are there to gamble, executing your ranges cleanly, and walking away when the session calls for it.

Rake Impact Visualizer

This is what the \$12 per-pot rake at Encore actually costs you — compared to online sites. The bar represents hourly rake cost per player at a 9-handed table, assuming pots are raked every hand.

Hourly Rake Cost Per Player — Comparable Venues

Encore 1/3

~\$13–15/hr

Live 1/2 avg

~\$8–10/hr

PokerStars NL10

~\$1.50–2/hr

GGPoker NL10

~\$1.20–1.80/hr

ACR NL10

~\$1.00–1.50/hr

Encore rake is 7–10× higher than online NL10. Your edge must be proportionally larger to profit.

Minimum Winrate to Beat Rake

At 25–30 hands per hour live, you need a significant skill edge just to break even against the rake. Here is what the math looks like at Encore 1/3 vs online:

ENCORE 1/3 LIVE

Rake/hr

~\$14

Break-even

\$14+ /hr needed

Good winrate

\$25–40/hr

Hands/hr

25–30

ONLINE NL10

Rake/hr

~\$1.80

Break-even

\$1.80/hr

Good winrate

\$4–8/hr

Hands/hr

60–80+