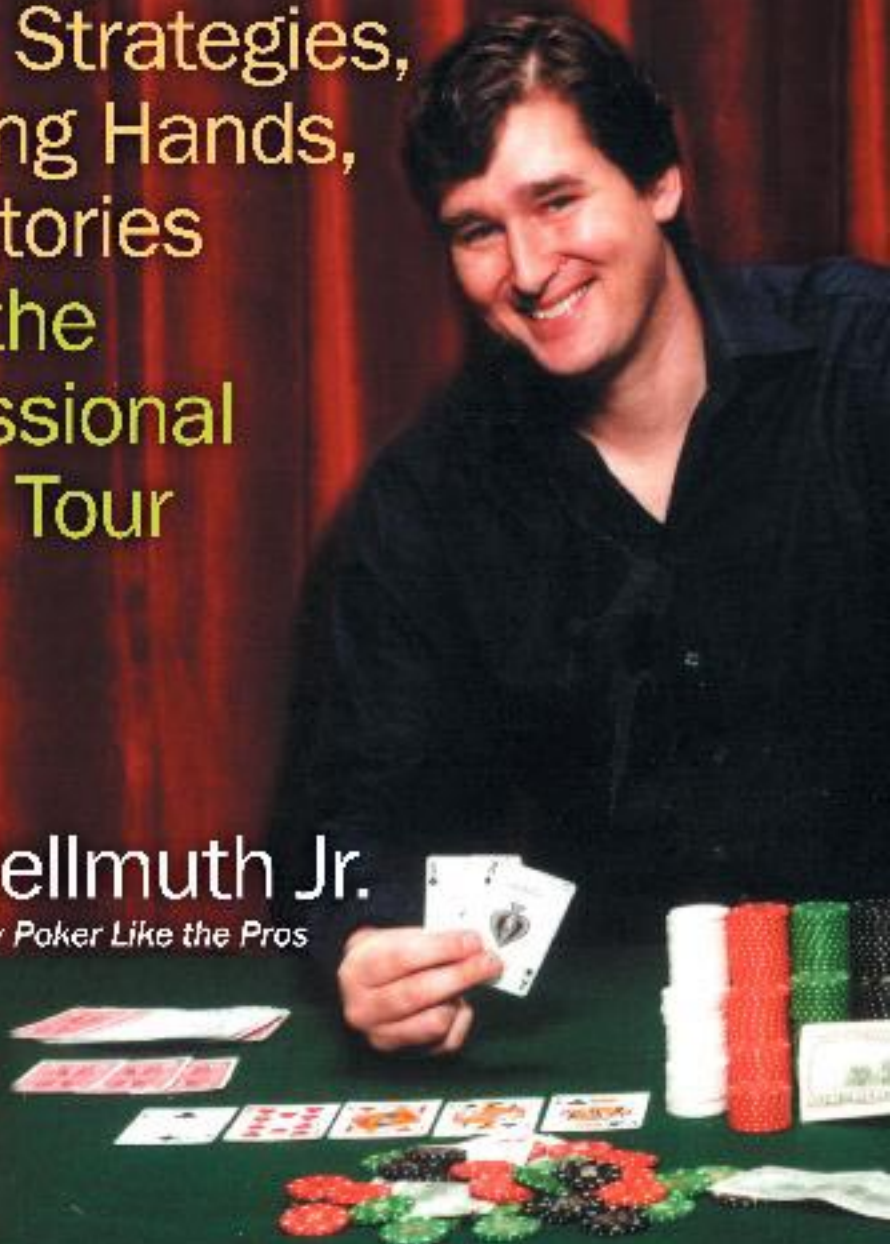


Bad Beats and Lucky Draws

Poker Strategies,
Winning Hands,
and Stories
from the
Professional
Poker Tour

Phil Hellmuth Jr.

Author of Play Poker Like the Pros



Poker Strategies, Winning Hands, and Stories from the Professional Poker Tour



BAD BEATS

and LUCKY

DRAWS

Phil Hellmuth Jr.

To my youngest son, Nicholas,
who knows how to call a spade a spade.

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Introduction

Back in 1987, we would hear the poker floor men—standing just outside the empty poker room at the Stardust Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas—selling poker seats by loudly and rhythmically yelling, “Poker, poker, poker, Texas Hold’em and Seven-Card Stud!” Those were the days. Or rather, those were the days—not so long ago—when professional poker was still unknown to the public. Now the poker rooms can’t keep people out, whether you’re talking about the United States or Europe!

With poker strategy books like Doyle Brunson’s *Super System* and my *Play Poker Like the Pros* (available at philhellmuth.com) flying off the shelves in record numbers; with the explosion of on-line poker rooms, like UltimateBet.com (UB draws 100,000 players a night!); with new real-world casinos, new online casinos, and new Indian casinos popping up all over the country; with the WSOP

(World Series of Poker) on ESPN, the WPT (World Poker Tour) on the Travel Channel, *Late Night Poker* on Fox, *Celebrity Poker Showdown* on Bravo, and many other poker tournaments being broadcast all over the television dial—with all this out there, who can doubt that poker today is red hot!

What happened? We might think of the poker of not so long ago as a warehouse full of pyrotechnics. For years, that warehouse had threatened to erupt into a spectacular blaze. I mean, poker tournaments already had their handsome prize pools and their stunning first-place prizes. The tournaments already had their big exciting bluffs, their fantastic blunders, and their incredible calls. And poker already was a game that anyone can play.

Among those at the final tables today we've had 76-year-olds like John Bonetti; we had quiet, savvy young men like 26-year-old Phil Ivey; we had 64-year-old women like Barbara Enright; we had players from Vietnam, Russia, Taiwan, China, Spain, Puerto Rico, France, England, Germany, and Morocco; and now we have players who learned serious poker on the Internet and later moved into high-stakes games, like 2003 World Champion of Poker Chris Moneymaker. In fact, we have men and women of all ages, races, and nationalities winning major poker tournaments today. We also have a lot more *professional* players, because there's so much more money out there now.

So what was it that ignited that pile of pyrotechnics? The final piece of the puzzle, the one that finally ignited the fireworks, was this: the tournaments put cameras beneath the table, exposing the players' hole cards. Now the television audience could follow the play.

Late Night Poker, in the United Kingdom, was the first to bring hole-card cameras to television, and it enjoyed huge ratings in London. In 2003, Steve Lipscomb and Lyle Berman of the World Poker Tour brought the cameras to the United States, and since then poker has exploded here as well. When the World Series of Poker was cranking up, I urged all concerned to allow the pending ESPN coverage to use hole-card cameras, when most other players were against it, or

on the fence. I understood the great players' hesitation: we all felt as if such play-by-play coverage would give away too many of our secrets. Or just get in our heads and distract us from playing our game. And of course, some of us didn't want the public to see how often we bluffed!

In 2001, the Bicycle Club, in Los Angeles, saw an all-time-low field for their championship event. Only 36 people put up the \$5,000 apiece buy-in to play. In 2003, five months after the WPT hit the air on the Travel Channel, and two months after the WSOP hit the air on ESPN (to NBA-like ratings), the Bike had 380-plus players putting up \$10,000 each to play. First place in 2001 was \$116,000; first place in 2003 was \$570,000! What's more, celebrities like Ben Affleck, Los Angeles Lakers owners Frank Mariani and Jerry Buss, and Lou Diamond Phillips played in the 2003 tournament.

I was at both championships, and what a difference. Honestly, I left for ten minutes in the middle of the 2003 Bike championship event, just to gather myself. I was stunned by what I saw. I mean, three local news crews, *Entertainment Tonight*, *Sports Illustrated*, and a German TV crew were just some of the press set up or circulating in the tournament room. The room was filled to capacity with players, fans, and curious onlookers. In 2001, there had been no press, and the room was almost empty. OK, I've made my point, and everyone reading this introduction already knows that poker is burning it up.

But as a result of the hole-card camera coverage, what we hear from the American and European publics today is this: "I didn't know that Texas Hold'em was such an easy game to play." Hold'em is easy to play? Well . . . yes. The old saying goes like this: "Hold'em takes minutes to learn, but a lifetime to master." Never was a truer statement uttered! The fact that learning Hold'em literally takes five or ten minutes has been a huge factor in the explosion of poker today. But again, it was the hole-card cameras that brought that fact to light.

In the old days, many people who watched the Hold'em coverage on TV simply changed the channel, saying, "Boy, this game sure

looks complicated. Trying to follow the action is just too much effort, and for that matter, there isn't much action to follow." Exposing the hole cards changed all that overnight. No-limit Hold'em, the poker game where you can bet any amount of your chips at any time, is boring? Please.

Let's look at an example hand, one that illustrates the difference between how we viewed the game in the old days and how we can view it today. Before, when we saw Annie Duke or Russ Hamilton bet \$100,000, and then watched opponents simply fold their hands, that's all we knew about the hand. A bet, and then fold, fold, fold, which did look pretty slow on TV, pretty cut-and-dried. Now, when Annie or Russ bets \$100,000, we see: first, their hole cards—say, K-Q; second, the looks on their faces; third, an opponent sweating out a tough decision with, say, A-J. What will he do with that A-J—he folds it? Now the viewers at home are thinking, "He folded? No! He should have moved all-in!" These days we see the sweat, the bluffs, the reads, the mistakes, and the great moves unfold right before our eyes. And guess what: the players are all accustomed to it by now.

So what is *Bad Beats and Lucky Draws* about? Basically, this book is about interesting, often key hands that I've culled from my 18 years in the poker world. Each account discusses what the players were doing, and thinking, and often whether the moves they made were the right moves to make, according to Phil Hellmuth Jr. (me). But each account also talks about the great settings where the hands took place, often at prestigious events like the World Series of Poker, the World Poker Tour, or a European Poker Tour championship. Finally, each hand reveals the emotions the players felt as they made their moves and mistakes, and battled to make poker history. Think of the book as an advanced-strategy window, an educational glimpse, into the poker world through my eyes.

In *Bad Beats and Lucky Draws*, I have gathered these hands into eight chapters. (A bad beat, by the way, is when you are truly unlucky in a given poker hand.) One chapter, titled "World Series of Poker Hands," talks about 14 of the hands that I have witnessed—or played in—at the most prestigious poker tournament of our time,

the WSOP. Another chapter is devoted to the World Poker Tour. “Against All Odds” talks about some of the weirdest and unlikeliest hands that I’ve ever seen or heard about. “From the Other Side of the Table” offers accounts of hands written up by guest authors like Doyle “Texas Dolly” Brunson, Annie Duke, Johnny “The Oriental Express” Chan, Ted Forrest, Men “The Master” Nguyen, and Layne Flack, to name a few. The mind-sets of these people, and the nuances of their reasoning, make fascinating reading.

“European Poker Tour” covers some of the hands that I’ve played in Europe, in places like Amsterdam, Paris, Vienna, and Cardiff, Wales. “Poker Hollywood Style,” talks about interesting hands played by the likes of Matt Damon, Edward Norton, *Hustler* magnate Larry Flynt, Nicole Sullivan, Paul Rudd, and Jerry Buss and Frank Mariani. Still other chapters include “Reading Other Players’ Mail” (about great “reads”), and “Cheesehead Poker” (about my beginnings in Madison, Wisconsin).

Go ahead and open this book, and read through two or three of the hands, to get a sense of what I’ve tried to do. I hope you find these stories well told, compelling, and illuminating. Better yet, a blast to read! I’ve enjoyed gathering these accounts together, and I’ve tried my best to make sure that you’ll love them.

Good luck, whether you’re trying to second-guess the players or are out there playing some hands yourself.

1

Against All Odds

As I read through these amazing hands, I realize I remember them all—and some all too well! Many of them I would like to forget, like the one titled “The Weirdest and Biggest Pot of My Life—So Far,” which talks about a key \$1.5 million pot that I lost at the final table of the 2001 WSOP (World Series of Poker). Another couple of hands that I would like to forget are the two titled “Wow, Are You Serious?” and “Phil Misreads His Hand, Too,” where T. J. Cloutier and I both misread our hands in key pots, one of them on Fox TV! Others, like “Spooky Hand,” I remember fondly. Whatever else might be said about them, these are all remarkably odd hands.

THE SHIRT OFF MY BACK

Very superstitious, writing's on the wall . . .

When you believe in things you don't understand . . .

—Stevie Wonder, “Superstition,” 1972

You often hear about the superstitions of sports figures: some refuse to shower or shave before a big game, others only wear a certain pair of socks, and some may take a certain route to the ball field, being careful to avoid the baseline. In fact, Michael Jordan always wore a pair of sky-blue North Carolina shorts beneath his NBA shorts in every pro game he played, and don't try to tell me that they helped him fly higher! Whatever works, right? If it ain't broke, don't fix it, and all that.

The same may be true for some of the professional poker players I know. In future tournaments, will John Duthie wear the same lucky black shirt he was wearing when he won the 2000 Poker Million—and a million pounds?

(That's *my* shirt, by the way, John. Is there any chance you'll be giving it back to me someday? You told me quite clearly, when I literally gave you the shirt off my back, that my black UltimateBet.com shirt was the only one you'd be willing to wear. Afterward, you told millions of television viewers that you were wearing my shirt, so it's hard to believe you don't remember that it's mine. Ultimate Bet.com and I certainly appreciate the exposure, but can I get the shirt back now? Or do you intend to wear it again soon? I guess I can't blame you. If I had won in 2000, I'd be wearing the same shirt, too!)

Will past Shooting Star winners John Bonetti and Huck Seed find themselves in the same accommodations when they go to Silicon Valley to play in Bay 101's Shooting Stars event?

(That was *my* house, by the way, Huck and Bono. Of course, someone staying at my house will win again. Maybe I shouldn't have invited you to stay again. Oh yeah, that's right, you invited yourselves to stay at my house! Even if I did pay for my house by staking Bono in the past, a man's got to make a living. Do I want to give

away a percentage of what I have to win by having the two of you, and, geez, Andy Glazer as well, stay with me this year? Well, never let it be said that I'm not a man of my word. Sure, come on and stay over. I'll just have to make do with only a 25 percent chance of winning the Shooting Stars, along with Huck, Bono, and Andy!)

Wait a minute, I think I see a trend! Maybe I'm the good-luck charm! After all, I'm burdened with my own superstitions as well. I always wear black at major championship events, and you have to admit that my success is better than average. But does this make any sense at all? As a game theorist, I know that my chances to win are the same whether I wear black or white, but I have to admit to being a bit superstitious. And I believe only in good luck (not bad), and that should count for something.

Anyway, wearing my trademark good-luck black shirt (yes, the same type that John Duthie wore at the 2000 Poker Million), I attacked the \$1,000 buy-in HOSE tournament (Hold'em, Omaha Eight or Better, Stud, and Stud Eight or Better) at the Commerce Casino's Los Angeles Poker Classic in 2002. (The Commerce Casino should be applauded for putting on a terrific poker tournament! Their room is the best one we have in poker today. And, the huge numbers of players have made for big prize pools.)

Even though I showed up for the tournament an hour late, I had a huge chip lead by the end of the second hour of play. I was running red hot! By the time I was heads-up with Tommy Huffnagle (a great player who was playing awesome poker), I had \$65,000 in chips to his \$50,000. Sometimes in poker we make deals, and because I respected Tommy, we did make one. In this way, we could both have a nice payday—whereas first-place money is usually double what second-place money is. We would play for only \$1,600 and the trophy (there is a lot of luck in heads-up limit poker). At this point in the proceedings, it was 4:30 A.M., and the no-limit Hold'em event was to begin the next day at 3:30 P.M. With an eye to getting some sleep and playing the next day—plus, we were now only playing for \$1,600—we doubled the limits, and set out to gamble!

I must say that I did covet the trophy, and when a key hand came up at 5:00 A.M., I could taste the victory. We were playing \$4,000–\$8,000 limit Stud (the “S” part of HOSE) when I opened for \$4,000 with (Ac-Qc) Jc and Tommy raised with (3h-9h) 6h. I decided just to call the \$4,000 more (Tommy had another \$8,000 left), and maybe to fold if he paired his six. Tommy did pair his six, but I caught the 4c to give me a flush draw.

We put in his last \$8,000 and flipped the hands faceup. Tommy said, “Wow, you’ve got a monster hand there. I guess this thing is over.” He stood up. I kinda thought it was over as well (yippee, I win!). Then I caught an ace for a board of Ac-Qc, Jc, 4c, Ad, followed by a four for aces and fours.

Tommy caught the 5h, then the Ah, for a board of (3h-9h) 6h, 6d, 5h, Ah to make an ace-high flush! That was OK, I thought, because I could still win if I hit a club (for a higher ace-high flush) or an ace or four (for a full house). When I caught a blank on the end, I sat back down in my chair ready to continue the fight. But, alas, it wasn’t my day. Tommy continued to play great poker, and went on to win the tournament.

Meanwhile, it was one more case of being so close to victory that I could taste it—but instead facing a major disappointment. I guess I’ll wear a black sweater the next time.

EXTRASENSORY PERCEPTION?

Have you ever felt you had ESP (extrasensory perception) when calling a player’s hand? OK, let me rephrase that question so it doesn’t sound so mystical. Have you ever called a person’s poker hand so exactly that you even scared yourself? I’m not talking about thinking simply that “Matt has pocket aces, pocket kings, or pocket queens.” I’m talking about saying to yourself, “Matt has pocket queens, period. I know this because it popped into my head.”

How exactly did it pop into your head, you ask? Three possibilities leap to mind. Possibility number one: it emerged from practiced observation, logic, intuition, and perception. (“Logic told me it was

aces, kings, or queens, because Matt plays so tight. But the little bit of fear I observed in him pre-flop led me to believe he has queens.”) Possibility number two: some part of my mind remembers exactly the way Matt acted the last time he had pocket queens. (“I’ve seen it before.”) Possibility number three: I was “looking into my opponent’s soul.”

Let me elaborate on possibility number three, in which some form of ESP, not yet fully understood by humans, actually occurs. Uh-oh, I have said it. Now, please don’t send me an e-mail applauding my conversion to belief in ESP. (Sorry, Mom, I’m not a true believer yet.) And don’t believe that I’ve cracked up yet. I may eventually crack up from the pressure of being a professional poker player, but my wife tells me that that has not happened yet. In examining the possibility of ESP, I am merely exploring all of the options here.

Where do logic, intuition, observation, and perception end, and where does ESP begin? I don’t know if ESP ever begins, but check out the following two stories that I can offer you. The first illustrates the power of logic, feel, observation, and perception. The second goes a bit beyond all of that, and makes me wonder about the existence of “something else.” Why don’t you judge for yourself?

In the first case, I managed to call the exact hole cards that Kevin McBride and Scotty Nguyen held in a big pot in the 1998 WSOP, before they were flipped up (check out the 1998 WSOP video). I can tell you that my intrinsic ability to do that was all about logic, intuition, observation, and perception. When Scotty raised the hand pre-flop, Kevin gave off an easy-to-read vibe of strength while he smooth-called Scotty’s raise.

On the end, with the board showing 4-6-K-A-Q (the cards came off in that order), Kevin bet \$80,000 and Scotty raised about \$250,000. I was fairly certain that Scotty had the nuts, or J-10, because the way he was acting and betting showed extreme strength on the end. I felt especially certain that this was the case because he seemed weak when he checked both the flop and fourth street. The first half of the puzzle, in other words, wasn’t all that hard to figure out.

I had also noticed that when the ace had come off on fourth street, Kevin had made a small, nearly imperceptible “jump” in his chair, and I therefore assumed that the ace had hit him. I know that Scotty had read Kevin’s strength both pre-flop and on fourth street, which allowed Scotty to check his straight draw on fourth street behind the trapping Kevin. Thus, Scotty benefited by winning \$330,000 on the last round of betting, when he hit his queen to make a straight.

When Kevin debated the \$250,000 call on the river, his seriousness told me he had aces up. Since Kevin had acted weakly on the flop, but strongly on the pre-flop, I assumed that he did not have a king with his ace, but rather a queen. (I didn’t think Kevin would study all that time and then act as he did with only A-J.) So I announced that I thought Scotty had J-10 and Kevin had A-Q suited (I admit that knowing it was suited was a lucky guess). Sure enough, Scotty had J-10 and Kevin had A-Q suited. I looked like a genius that time out, but I think that a few players could have made the same deductions, although maybe not as quickly as I had.

Now let’s examine another hand, at the final table of the Tournament of Champions 2000, in which I almost knew what Alan Colon’s hole cards were. To me, this hand, which I observed as a commentator, is more about ESP or unexplained “knowing” than the last hand was. Alan Colon (second in chips with \$470,000) opened for \$70,000, and Josh Arie (the chip leader with \$570,000) raised it up, making it \$220,000 to go. Without any hesitation whatsoever, Alan moved all-in for his whole \$470,000 (about \$250,000 more) and Josh was put to the test.

Immediately, when Alan moved in \$470,000, I thought he was making a stand with pocket tens. That 10-10 read of mine just stuck in my head, although I don’t know if I made that call on the broadcast or not. I do remember that we called Josh’s hand as pocket jacks, which he later told Daniel Negreanu was the case. Josh did end up folding his hand pre-flop, which I thought was OK as long as he thought that Alan had a higher pair than his jacks.

Over the next few hours, I couldn’t get the “vision” of 10-10 out

of my head. Did a hole card flash, you ask me now? No, I was about 25 feet away, not close enough to the table to see a card flash, and in any case Alan had thrown his hand in facedown. Further, there was no talk about the hand at all after that point in time during the final table play.

Three hours later, while I was interviewing Alan for the live Internet broadcast, I wanted to ask if he'd had the 10-10 that hand, but it didn't seem to be the appropriate time just then. So I waited until the trophy presentation was over. I told Daniel Negreanu, "I have to know about that hand. I just know he had pocket tens. I'm going over to ask him about it now." I said, "Listen, Alan, when you played the big pot against Josh and wound up going all-in, I was certain you had pocket tens."

He replied with shock and disbelief, "Wow, that's exactly what I had that hand!" I knew he was telling the truth: "Dee-dee-dee-dee" (to the tune of *The Twilight Zone* theme song). Maybe I saw the "I'm going to make a stand" look on his face, and thus was able to narrow it down to 10-10, 9-9, or 8-8. But how could the 10-10, exactly, "stick in my craw" (as T. J. Cloutier likes to say) and drive me so crazy that I had to ask Alan if he had pocket tens in this hand three hours later?

I don't mean to suggest that I have ESP. I know that if that were the case, I would win a lot more poker tournaments than I do! But as my good friend Ted Forrest likes to say, "What the heck is going on?" Was there really enough information here to justify a perceptive poker player's guessing that Alan had exactly the 10-10 in his hand? Maybe, but the very perceptive Daniel Negreanu was guessing aces, kings, queens, or A-K on the Internet broadcast.

Was I just reading people particularly well then? Probably. After all, I had finished high in a bunch of tournaments in a row. Was it just a lucky guess that I made? Would I have been surprised if Alan had told me he had pocket nines that hand? I think I would have been. But be that as it may, the 10-10 did stay with me, with a sense more of conviction than of conclusion. Where do logic, intuition, observation, and perception end, and where does something else begin?

HONEY, *THAT* WAS A BAD BEAT!

Have you ever tried to teach your significant other how to play poker? I did in 1990, and it was a pretty frustrating experience for my wife! But what could I do? If you're going to date and marry a World Champion of Poker, you'd better at least have some understanding of how to play the game.

My wife, Kathy, was very game about learning how to play poker, even though I would occasionally jump up out of my seat and say, "How could you make that play!" In fact, she was one of my best students ever. She somehow put up with me (that would never happen today!), and progressed rapidly from someone who didn't know what a straight was to someone who made the final two players in limit Hold'em tournaments in back-to-back weeks, one with me!

After a second-place finish in a 44-player limit Hold'em event at a local Indian reservation (the Shawano) one weekend, she proceeded to reach heads-up with me the next weekend in another limit Hold'em event (this time with 25 players) in Madison, Wisconsin.

Phil: "Honey, the money's all going to the bank account—\$1,600 for first and \$900 for second. Do you want to just stop playing right now?"

Wife: "No way, hubby, let's play for the title!" With nothing on the line except ego, I was dumb enough to beat her that day. (I won, but I didn't win.)

A month later, she played in a Bicycle Club ladies' event with over 40 players. She finished in fourth place. So ended my wife's poker career, because being a doctor and a mother left her little time for poker during the past ten years.

My buddy Huck Seed introduced his former girlfriend, Dee Luong, to poker, and eventually she rose through the ranks to play \$50–\$100 limit Hold'em and higher. Dee is a well-known player at the Bellagio Casino today. There are a lot of successful poker couples out there, like World Series of Poker bracelet winners Harry and Jerri Thomas of Cincinnati, and Max and Maria Stearn of Costa Rica. No comment on who plays better in those bracelet-winning

couples, but I certainly made my opinion clear to Max and Harry the day after their wives won WSOP bracelets!

During those weeks when I was teaching my wife to play poker, the day came when I decided she was ready to play in Wayne Tyler's local \$5-\$10 poker game at Nora's, a bar located east of Madison. Within one hour of play, a local postal worker and old friend of mine named Bruce "The Fox" DeWitt got involved in a pot with my wife (a pot that I still remember well to this day, even though it happened in 1990).

Bruce raised it up with Ks-10d (pay attention to the suits here), and my wife called with A-Q in the small blind. With a flop of Ad-As-Qd, my wife put in the third bet (\$15 each) against Bruce on the flop. Fourth street brought the dream card for my wife when Bruce hit a straight with the Jd, for a board of Ad-As-Qd-Jd. My wife was able to cap it off (put in four bets) against Bruce (\$40 each). Bruce turned a bit red at this point, realizing that he was in a world of hurt. (You have to know Bruce to appreciate the fact that he turned red.)

The last card was the Kd, for a board of Ad-As-Qd-Jd-Kd, and Bruce had made a royal flush! My wife bet out. Bruce raised, and my wife only called, fearing Bruce's A-K.

Wow, what a beat! Bruce needed exactly the Kd and the Jd after the flop in order to win this hand. That's 22 to 1 times 43 to 1, making Bruce a 956-to-1 underdog on the flop! My wife calmly said, "Nice hand, Bruce." But I haven't always handled things so smoothly—and especially not in 1990! In fact, her bad beat cost me \$500, because *I* went on tilt.

"Honey, that was the worst bad beat I have ever seen! I know you've only played one hour of limit poker in your life, but believe me, these hands just never, ever come up. Bruce was trying to bluff you out after you flopped aces full of queens. He tried to bluff you off the best-possible hand. What a brutal beat! How can you fade ["fade" was the buzzword in poker at the time] that?"

Surprised by my wife's lack of emotions (as if everyone is supposed to be a volcano, like I am), I said, "Honey, don't you even

understand how preposterously unlucky you were in that hand?” She was unfazed, cool, like nothing happened.

POT-LIMIT OMAHA — WHAT A GAME.

OK, y’all, the following hand actually occurred in 2000, in a \$5–\$10 pot-limit Omaha game in Kinder, Louisiana. Jeff Sparks from Houston—still reeling from losing this shocking hand—wrote up the details, and sent them to me.

Small blind (SB): holds 5c-7c-8s-9s (\$800)

Big blind (BB): holds 3d-5s-7s-8d (\$1,000)

Position 1: under the gun, holds Ac-Ad-4c-4d (\$600)

Position 2: Jeff Sparks holds Kd-Ks-10d-10s (\$1,500)

Position 3: Holds As-Qs-Jh-9h (\$2,000)

Position 4: Holds Kh-10h-6d-6c (\$400)

Position one (P1) brought it in for \$35 under the gun, and all hands called, with good reasoning. The flop came down 10c-6s-4s. The SB, with a “wrap” (a multiscard straight draw) and a weak flush draw, led at the pot for \$150. The BB called the \$150 with a weaker wrap and a straight-flush draw, P1 (with the bottom set) called, and Jeff (P2) wanted a safe turn card before he put all of his money in the pot with the top set, so he just called. P3 (with the nut-flush draw) just called, and then P6 (with the middle set) just called.

Jeff got what looked to him (after the fourth ten) like the second-best card in the deck, the Kc, for a board of 10c-6s-4s-Kc. Then the SB checked, the BB checked, P1 checked, and Jeff (P2) bet the pot for about \$1,100. After all, the safe card that he was looking for had come—the Kc, which made him a set of kings to go with his set of tens. P3 now had a wrap draw as well as the nut-flush draw, and decided to put in all of his chips—about \$200 more than Jeff had put in.

The pot had become so outlandish that P4 had to call with his small money (about \$250). Then everyone else called all-in as well,

with about four side pots (when someone is all-in, the extra money goes into a side pot). That \$5,800 made a pretty big pot, especially this early in the night (two hours into the game), and Jeff wanted some insurance, or at least to see how many outs there were against his hand.

Funny thing about that safe card on the turn, though. It gave Jeff the nuts with one to come, but it also killed him deadlier than a stone! Can you believe it? There was not a single card in the deck that could come on the last card that would have allowed Jeff to win the pot. If you don't believe me, take a closer look. (By the way, I just remembered that famous statement: Be careful what you ask for, you might get it.) In this case, the off-suit king looked like Jeff's second-best-possible card. He got what he wanted, only to find out that it was the worst-possible card in the deck for his hand!

Fortunately for Jeff, the big blind ended up winning the pot on the river when the 2d came off of the deck for a final board of 10c-6s-4s-Kc-2d, which allowed Jeff to lose only \$500 on the hand. Repeat that out loud once. Jeff was lucky to lose only \$500 on a hand where he had the "stone-cold nuts" (best-possible hand) with one card to come!

SPOOKY HAND

One of the spookiest hands I have ever been involved with occurred in the \$5,000 buy-in limit Hold'em event at the World Series of Poker in 1993. By "spooky," I mean lucky beyond explanation. I'm afraid that my own analysis of the hand makes my play appear pretty poor. In my own defense, I will say that I had won the no-limit Hold'em tournament the day before, and had been up until 7:00 A.M. on Saturday winning it. This hand came up at roughly 11:00 on Saturday night, after we started the tournament at noon that day.

We were down to four players that year: the late great World Champion Jack Keller, "Miami" John Cernuto, Don "The World's Greatest Unknown Poker Player" Williams (yes, that really is Don's

nickname), and me. We were playing \$3,000–\$6,000 limit, and the chip counts were important. Jack Keller had \$38,000 in chips, Miami had \$8,000, Don had \$18,000, and I had over \$250,000. First place was \$144,000, second was \$72,000, third was \$36,000, and fourth was roughly \$22,000.

Miami John made it \$6,000 to go on the button with Qc-Js. I called \$4,500 more in the small blind (\$1,500) with 5d-3s. Jack reraised \$3,000, making it \$9,000 to go with pocket holdings of Jd-Jc. Miami called his last \$2,000 all-in (\$8,000 total), and I called the \$3,000 raise. Miami could now win my \$8,000, Jack's \$8,000, and his own \$8,000, or \$24,000 total. So the main pot had \$24,000, and a side pot between Jack and me held \$2,000.

The flop was 3d-3c-6h. I bet \$3,000, Jack raised it up, making it \$6,000 to go, and I called. The next card was the 7h, making 3d-3c-6h-7h on the board. I checked, Jack bet \$6,000, and I then check-raised, making it \$12,000 to go. Jack then reraised, making it \$18,000 to go, and I re-reraised his last \$5,000, making it \$23,000 to go, whereupon he called his last \$5,000 all-in. Jack needed the last jack in the deck, but it wasn't there. The final card was the 10s, which made the final board 3d-3c-6h-7h-10s. I won the pot with three threes and eliminated two players in the process. Don Williams, who had been watching this fracas, was ecstatic, having moved up from maybe \$22,000 (fourth-place money) to a guaranteed minimum of \$72,000 (second-place money).

What really happened here? I should never have called Miami John's raise with a 5d-3s. It was a terrible call to make. Why would I want to double up Miami with a 5d-3s? He was on the ropes with only \$8,000. Why not wait for a real hand against him? In fact, I was hoping that Jack would call in the big blind, and perhaps that we could eliminate John between the two of us.

My logic was flawed here, but I was just tired enough to make a call with a hand that I would not be playing 98 percent of the time. Because of this terrible call, I reaped a huge reward. The professional poker players call this "spooky."

What about the other players' actions during this hand? Miami

John made a good \$6,000 raise with Qc-Js and a good call for his last \$2,000 all-in. Jack Keller made a good reraise to \$9,000 before the flop with Jd-Jc. Jack also made a good raise to \$6,000 to go on the flop; it was a seemingly great flop (3-3-6) for his hand. Jack made a good \$6,000 bet after I checked to him on the fourth card (3-3-6-7), but I believe he made a really bad reraise to \$18,000. In his shoes, I would have called only \$12,000 total. Then I could have called \$6,000 on the last bet, and saved my last \$5,000 in case Jd-Jc was no good. It was very likely that when I check-raised it against Jack in this spot—making it \$12,000 to go after the fourth card—his hand was beaten, especially since we had put in two bets after the flop. My hand could easily have been three threes or Q-Q or K-K or A-A, all of which beat him. You never know what can be accomplished by saving \$5,000. Maybe Jack would have won the tournament or moved up to second place; after all, Don did have only \$18,000 in chips left.

In poker, we say that all you need to win a tournament is “a chip and a chair.” Perhaps some of you out there are capable of throwing Jack Keller’s hand away on fourth street (after the fourth card). You could save yourself from calling off my raise of \$6,000 on fourth street and \$6,000 on the end—or \$12,000 total. This would leave you with \$17,000 (\$12,000 plus \$5,000) to battle with. But laying the J-J down right then and there would be incredibly difficult to do, and would be based solely on your read of your opponent (me). Even if you felt that you had a great read on someone, this would certainly be a tough hand to lay down.

Twenty minutes after this hand ended, I went on to win my fifth World Series of Poker bracelet! This win was special to me for three reasons. First, I successfully defended my title—I had won the same WSOP \$5,000 buy-in limit Hold’em event in 1992. Second, I had won two WSOP events back to back—in two days! And third, it was my third WSOP victory *that year* (1993). Even though this spooky hand may not have had a huge bearing on the final result (after all, I did have a monster chip lead), it was memorable because of that 5-3 off suit!

ALL DRUGGED UP

All right, I bet that got your attention, didn't it? I was actually on drugs when this hand came up. You see, I had asked my M.D. wife to prescribe a strong sleeping pill for the night before the "Big One" (the \$5,000 championship event) in Reno at the World Poker Challenge in 2000. I guess the lingering effects of this sleeping pill helped remove some of my inhibitions. In other words, I was out of control at the poker table as far as my hand selection was concerned, and I was acting as if I didn't have a care in the world.

At one stretch, I raised 12 pots in a row, and, if anyone called me, I would bluff out at the flop as well. Not only that, but I showed all 12 bluffs and was singing the song from the Mazda car commercial on television. (You know the one: "Zoom, zoom, zoom.") I was having a grand old time, ramming and jamming, bluffing and rebluffing, raising and reraising, and singing the whole time! John Bonetti, who was at my starting table that day, told me at the break, "You're putting the fear of God into these people today [with your fast, reckless play]."

With Richard Tatalovich playing very conservatively immediately to my right, I felt there was a good chance that he and I might go a little crazy against one another. You see, Richard is not known for tight, conservative play. In fact, he is a known "megalomaniac" (Daniel Negreanu's word), which is not a bad thing. It just means that you're capable of playing really fast at times, and calling other players' big bluffs when you're weak. In fact, Daniel won't take a piece of a player in a no-limit Hold'em tournament unless the player is a megalomaniac! With Richard's known fast-play tendencies, and me stuck in hyperfast mode, you can see why I was expecting something crazy to happen between us eventually.

Anyway, Richard had accumulated some chips using his tight, aggressive style, and started playing bully at the table by raising a lot of pots and making a lot of bluffs. He took my place as aggressor, minus the singing of "Zoom, zoom, zoom!" With Richard pounding the blinds every hand, I decided that I'd seen enough; it was time to make some moves. It was time to be a player (play-ahh!).

With the blinds at \$50–\$100, the following hand came up. Richard opened the pot for \$350 on the button, and I decided to raise him \$900 more in the dark (without even looking at my hand!, although I did pretend to look at it), making it \$1,250 total. Now Richard called the \$900 more, and the flop was 3c-5h-6s. Without even knowing my hand yet, I bet out \$1,400, and Richard reached back deep and moved all of his chips (about \$10,000) into the pot. Then I slowly peeked at my cards: first I saw a two, and then I saw a six. I had flopped top pair and a “gutshot” (inside) straight draw. OK, if Richard was bluffing or semibluffing with a straight draw, then my hand wasn’t too bad.

Now my focus turned to Richard. “What the heck does he have here, anyway?” I asked myself while I studied his face and movements and replayed the pre-flop action in my mind. As I further contemplated putting in my last \$6,000 with this very weak hand, I sensed that Richard’s was even weaker. The more I thought about it, the more I put Richard on a pair of fives with an ace kicker, or an ace with a four kicker for a straight draw or pocket fours, which would give him a pair and a straight draw. After a minute, I decided that I had the better hand, and I pushed all of my remaining chips into the pot. It turns out that Richard had the 5d-4d, giving him an open-ended straight draw and a pair of fives. I was right, I did have the better hand! But could I hold him? He could win with a five, for three fives, and a deuce or a seven would make him a straight. The next cards were blanks (a queen and an eight), and I won this pot.

The rest of the table just looked at the two of us like we were a couple of space aliens! I mean here we are, early in a \$5,000 buy-in no-limit Hold’em tournament, putting in thousands of dollars with a five high and a six high! Of course, everyone there was expecting to see us with big pairs as our hole cards! Richard and I shook hands, smiled, and said to each other, “Boy, was that a fun pot to play or what!” I really like Richard and the way he plays poker, but I have to avoid those prescription sleeping pills in the future. (Or do I?)

NEVER GIVE UP!

While I was playing in the Bellagio's Five-Star World Poker Classic's \$1,000 buy-in pot-limit Hold'em tournament in December 2002, the following series of hands unfolded. (On page 21, in the piece titled "Phil Misreads His Hand, Too," I recount how, in that same Bellagio event, I made one of the stupidest moves I have ever made in a poker game! This series of hands shows that you can never give up in a poker tournament.)

Two off of the button, with the blinds at \$100–\$200, I opened the pot for \$600 of my remaining \$900 with K-9. Max Stearn, holding 10-10, just called in the small blind, because he was afraid to reraise and possibly run into a big hand in the big blind. I don't blame Max for just calling at this point in the hand; after all, it looked like he was going to get my last \$300 in any case.

With a flop of A-10-8, Max checked, and then I checked. (By the way, if he had bet my last \$300 here on the flop, then I would have called fairly quickly because of the pot odds—he could have had a small pair here as well.) The fourth card made Max four tens, and he checked. At this point, I'm folding my hand for a \$300 bet. And I'm folding no matter what hits on the last card—although a king would have tempted me to call. The last card was a three, and now Max bet my last \$300, and I quickly folded.

With \$300 left, I folded my next two hands, and shut my eyes to maintain focus—I was upset that I was going to be eliminated. But, if I was going down—and with \$300 left, it sure looked as if I was going down—then at least I would give myself a chance and go down calmly. Under the gun, I moved all-in with Ac-10c, and was called by the button and the big blind. I scooped the \$1,000 pot when the board came down A-K-Q-5-7. Then, in the big blind, I folded Ac-4c for a \$400 raise. (Again, I wanted to give myself the best-possible chance to double up, and A-4 isn't it!) The next hand, while in the small blind, Kenny "Skyhawk" Flaton—a great player, but an even greater guy—raised two off of the button with 7-7, and I moved all-in for \$800 total with As-Qs. When a queen hit the board, I had won the \$1,800 pot.

Next hand, I picked up Q-Q on the button, and raised one player

who had called the \$200 bet. Everyone folded, and now I had \$2,300. The very next hand I picked up J-J, and moved all-in when someone else opened with A-Q. The A-Q called me, and my J-J won the \$4,900 pot. Three hands later I was under the gun again (exactly one round after having the \$300 under the gun), this time with A-A. I opened for \$600, and Skyhawk raised me \$2,400 more from the small blind. I moved all-in, and Skyhawk quickly called and flipped up Q-Q. My A-A held up, and now I had exactly \$10,000!

I had started the round with \$300, and ended it with \$10,000! Wow! “OK,” I thought, “I must not lose a big pot, as I often do when I make a big comeback like this.” But no, I couldn’t help what happened next (although I should have been able to!). I raised it up with 9-9, and was called by A-A (smooth-calling with A-A can be very dangerous!). After a flop of 4-6-8, I bet out and was raised. I didn’t know my opponent from Adam, and I decided that he probably had A-8, and I moved him all-in. Knowing your opponent can make all the difference in the world in a situation like this—after playing with him the rest of the day, I came to see that I would do well to fold in the same situation the next time. But alas, he called, and his hand held up, and now I was down to about \$3,000 again.

Having been down to \$300, \$3,000 seemed like a lot of chips to me, and I felt confident that I would run it up again. I fought and fought and fought, and by the time we reached the final table, I had the chip lead with over \$60,000. But I’ll put this account on hold for a bit, until after “Wow, Are You Serious?” Part Two (“Phil Misreads His Hand, Too!”) details one of the worst plays I have ever made in my life, as well as what happened at this particular final table with Howard Lederer, Jeff Shulman, Dennis Waterman, and Daniel Negreanu.

WOW, ARE YOU SERIOUS?

Here we go, then, coming off a third-place finish at Foxwoods—for \$280,000, where first had been \$1.1 million—in October 2003. After a week of rest with my mom and sister in Manhattan, I was ready to

rock and roll at the Sands' Million Dollar Deal showdown in Atlantic City. (I was still deeply frustrated with my third place at Foxwoods against Mr. "Move All-in." On page 87, you can read about it.)

Early on during day one at the Sands, nothing seemed to go right for me. I was tired (I'd had nightmares over what had happened to me at Foxwoods), and in a bad mood. But, I knew that if I could hold on long enough, I would have a chance to get positive and feel good—and, perhaps, catch a nice rush.

A few hours in, I was all-in with K-Q versus Amir Vahedi's J-J for my last \$2,100 or so. The flop was A-6-5, then Q, Q. A few minutes later, Matt Savage told me, "If you fellas can hang on for forty more minutes, we'll be moving you all to the 'TV table.'" At that point in time, I didn't like my chances.

A mere three minutes later, I moved all-in with ace high, and no one called me. I looked down at \$3,700 in chips, and suddenly, out of nowhere, I felt happy for no apparent reason. OK, this can't be bad, I thought. The next thing I knew I was at the TV table with \$22,000 in chips and a big smile on my face.

"I made it through the rain/I kept my world protected/I made it through the rain" (Barry Manilow) kept running through my head! Now it was just a matter of time before we made the final 45 players left in the tournament, and we would be finished playing for the night. I was feeling very proud of my play, and I knew that I had a chance to do something spectacular by winning the \$1 million after just missing it in my last event, merely one week before.

I finished the day with \$40,000 in chips, just as I had at Foxwoods the week before. In both cases I had had more chips, but in the Foxwoods case, I "blew up" (tilted) late to go from \$70,000 to \$40,000. In the Sands case, I played brilliantly down the backstretch, but just didn't catch a break.

I was very calm, and slept really well that night. Day two began, and I made an early run up to \$80,000—I did get lucky one pot for a \$26,000 pot when my Ad-Qd beat my opponent's Q-Q.

Then I picked up A-A, and lost \$18,000 to 10-7 off suit. That was followed closely by my picking up 8-8, whereupon I lost another

\$16,000, and that one, finally, was followed by my picking up Q-Q, which lost another \$4,000. But OK, I still had \$54,000 in chips, and now we were down to 27 players.

Redraw! And Hellmuth draws the TV table one more time. The very first hand was one of the weirdest that I've ever played in my life.

I picked up A-3 three positions off of the button, and couldn't decide what to do. Finally, I called the \$2,000 big blind bet (the blinds were \$1,000–\$2,000), and then T. J. Cloutier called in the small blind. The flop was Ks-Jc-7s, and T. J. and the BB (big blind) both checked. I felt there was a good chance that my ace high was good, so I bet out \$6,000, and T. J. quickly called me. "Great," I thought. "I let T. J. hit his jack-rag hand for free, and then I bet it."

The turn card was the As, for a possible straight or flush with Ks-Jc-7s-As. Now T. J. bet \$12,000 right out, and I immediately recalled a bluff that he made against me in 2001 at a World Series event. At that WSOP event, T. J. bluffed me and then showed me the bluff, and he said, "I know you're a great player. That's how I knew that I could bluff you. You can't bluff the bad players."

Somehow I knew (Daniel Negreanu, don't needle me about that word "knew"!) that T. J. was bluffing. I had been waiting since 2001 to nail him bluffing me. Now what to do: if I move all-in and I'm wrong, then I'm broke; if I'm right, then why move all-in? Why not let him bluff all of his chips on the end? I decided that calling was the right move here for me. The last card, 3s, wasn't very pretty: it put four spades on the board. Now any spade would beat me.

T. J. went ahead and bet out \$20,000, and my gut screamed out, "Call him, he's bluffing!" But I had only \$40,000 left, so I surveyed the situation quickly. I could only beat a pure bluff, and if I was wrong, then I was going to cripple myself. I counted out the \$20,000 with my gut screaming louder and louder, "Call!"

My gut has made me literally millions of dollars playing poker, and if I was wrong this time, then too bad. Besides, when I feel this strongly, it seems like I'm never wrong. So I called the \$20,000, feeling as if I was making a great call.

T. J. then rapped the table and said, “You got it.” I then flipped over my hole cards, feeling as if I had just made an incredible call. It also sent a message to the table: “Phil is on, so don’t — with him today.” The pot was about to be pushed as T. J. started folding his cards—he was still muttering under his breath that he knew that I had nothing on the flop. All of a sudden he says, “Wait a minute, I have a flush,” and he rolls over 10s-9c.

Now I know T. J., and I love T. J., and I know that he would never “slow-roll” me (slow-rolling is the worst possible etiquette in a poker hand). As if for confirmation, his heart rate—which was being monitored by Fox—spiked up only when he saw the 10s in his hand. Stunned by what had just happened to me, I literally fell to the floor on my knees. You see, I had just made a great call against a great player, one that I had been waiting 30 months to make, and I still lost! With \$80,000 in the pot, at the height of my game, I asked myself why this weird thing happened to me.

I believe that he would have given off signals of strength, not weakness, if he knew he had the flush. If T. J. had seen that he had the fifth spade, I believe I would have folded the hand easily on the end. I believe this, because this is what I do for a living: I read players.

A guy bluffs on the end, you read him perfectly, make the big-time call, and then still lose? Is it possible? I have played poker many years, and I’ve never, ever seen someone rap the table and say they were bluffing, and then, out of nowhere, “find” a hand. This had to be a 2,000-to-1 shot, maybe higher, when you consider that it happened against one of the world’s best players.

It took me a long time to pull myself together after that hand, but I still had chips, and I still had a chance. I had overcome bigger obstacles than this, I told myself. Six hands later, Paul Wolfe studied and studied, and I looked down at 8-8. He then opened for \$6,000, and I felt a ton of weakness, so I moved all-in for \$11,800 total. Paul had to call the \$5,800 with his A-7, as the BB player announced, “I folded A-9.”

“Great,” I thought, “only two aces left in the deck.” After a flop of J-4-2, an ace popped up, and I just couldn’t believe that I was out,

in 24th place. The last pot held nearly \$30,000, but what the heck had just happened to me? Wasn't I supposed to have \$100,000 in front of me? Wasn't I supposed to cruise easily into the final nine players—and the Fox TV coverage? Wasn't I supposed to have a good chance of winning \$1 million the next day?

From a poker point of view, it seems as if I deserved much better (I did make a great call), but who can judge these things? Perhaps I was lucky I was still in the tournament that late. I recognize this much, though: I am truly blessed on every possible level, and I thank the universe for all of it.

PHIL MISREADS HIS HAND, TOO!

In “Never Give Up” (see page 16) I wrote about the Bellagio's Five-Star World Poker Classic's \$1,000 buy-in pot-limit Hold'em tournament in December 2002, and how I ran \$300, under the gun, up to \$10,000 in one round, when the blinds were \$100–\$200. What a nice round of poker for me! I then told you that I eventually made the final table with the chip lead (over \$60,000 in chips) along with Howard Lederer (who was a short stack), Daniel Negreanu, Jeff Shulman (short stack), Dennis Waterman (who finished number one in *Card Player* magazine's pot-limit Hold'em category in 2002), and unknown Brian Green.

Jeff, Daniel, and Howard finished eighth, seventh, and sixth. Howard later told me, “I was very surprised that this random group played so well. Usually, when I don't know the players at a table they make a lot of mistakes.” Howard is right about this. The players at the final table that day were playing some great poker.

When we reached the final three players, Dennis and Brian asked me if I wanted to make a deal. I looked down and realized that I had \$150,000 of the \$276,000 in chips at the table. I declined, but I did realize that a deal would have netted me over \$40,000, when first, second, and third were \$53,500, \$26,700 and \$13,300, respectively.

As play continued, I was confident that I would eventually prevail. At this point, a very interesting hand came up between Brian and

Dennis. Dennis raised it up with Ad-9d, making it \$12,000 to go, and Brian reraised it, making it \$24,000 more with 8-8. Dennis studied forever, and then made a very unorthodox move: he just called the bet. After a flop of Js-6d-2h, Brian bet Dennis's last \$20,000, and Dennis "went into the tank" (he studied for at least two minutes).

Finally, Dennis called the bet with his A-9 high, no pair, no draw! Dennis was now all-in, but when the dealer dealt off a nine on fourth street, Dennis wound up winning the pot. Was Dennis's call here terrible? No, it wasn't, but if he felt A-9 was good, then, in my opinion, he should have put the money in before the flop. At this point, I thought, "There's no way that this miracle 'hit' of Dennis's could ever come back and bite me, could it? Imagine the parlay: Dennis is all-in in bad shape, Brian has only \$29,000 left. There's no way I'll end up finishing third and get only \$13,000."

A few hands later, Brian moved all-in with A-K, Dennis called with A-7 suited, and I called with 2-2. Brian survived when a king hit the board on the flop. A little while later, Dennis made a straight against me on the last card in a key pot, and now I was in third place in the chip count.

With Brian beginning to raise a ton of pots, I knew it was just a matter of time before I picked him off in a huge pot. So with the blinds at \$2,000–\$4,000, the following hand came up. I limped in the small blind with Ah-4h, and Brian raised \$8,000. I called quickly, and the flop came down 5s-6h-Qh; I had flopped the nut-flush draw. I checked, and then Brian checked. The fourth card was the 10h, and now I had the nut flush! How to play it, though? Perhaps a small bet that looked like a bluff? Yes!

I bet out \$8,000, trying to make it look like a bluff, and Brian fell right into my trap. He said, "Raise the size of the pot." As he put his chips into the pot, I thought he had me covered, so I moved all-in lightning fast, and he said call (if I raised, it was less than \$10,000). He flipped up his two black jacks as I said, "Nut flush." His face hit the floor. He had been overplaying his hands against me for two hours, and now he was drawing dead for all the money, just as I had foreseen!

Now I had all the chips, and I was wondering how he could have put all of his money in on two black jacks with this board, when it hit me. I had the Ad in my hand, not the Ah! He had raised me \$40,000 on the turn, virtually all of my chips, and I didn't even look back at my hand! I had just called off all of my chips with nothing! Talk about bad plays: here I was thinking how badly Brian had played the hand, when it was I who had misread my hand. Zoinks!

Luckily, it turned out that I was still drawing live to a heart or an ace, and I was thinking, "I deserve to hit it, since both of these guys have outdrawn me, and I've played so great today." ("Deserve" is a concept that someone wiser than I should grapple with. In fact, I probably "deserved" to finish third for misreading my hand!) Anyway, the last card was a blank, and I was eliminated and got \$13,300.

I kept thinking, I would have made over \$40,000 had I taken that deal! Well, I didn't have anyone to blame but myself this time. I wasn't superunlucky; I had just flat out misread my hand.

PLEASE, SOMEONE, "SPLIT THIS POT"

Let's make public, in the cold light of day, an incident that took place during the World Series of Poker in 2000. In order to get this story 100 percent right, I wrote down all of the details within seconds of the incident occurring. This incident has already been widely discussed within the poker community—as well it should be. It was also written up in Jim McManus's excellent book, *Positively Fifth Street*.

First off, let me say that I thought that Bob Thompson did a terrific job at the WSOP 2000. My opinion of him was further elevated when he said to me, "Phil, you write this article even if it makes me look bad. I'm the tournament director, and I'm willing to take the heat if I do something wrong." Spoken like a real man, Bob. But before we go throwing rocks at Bob Thompson, remember that there were at least 20 other people standing around the table, and 9 players at the table, all of whom also missed what happened.

With 18 people left in the “Big One,” Hassan Habib (with over \$600,000 in chips) raised the pot to about \$25,000 to go with Ac-9c. Taso Lazarou called his last \$25,000 or so with A-6 off suit. The hands were turned faceup and everyone in the room (at least 200 people) saw or heard that the board came down 5-8-K-5-J. It was announced that Taso was eliminated, to finish 18th, at which point Taso got up from the table, the cards were turned facedown, and Hassan was awarded the pot.

After about 20 seconds (20 seconds is a long time in this case, especially since Hassan already had the chips in his stack), I informed Taso that it was actually a split pot. Taso went back to the table and announced that he thought it was a split pot, and the pot was reconstructed and split accordingly.

Did I do something wrong here? Obviously, if I hadn’t said anything, the tournament would have continued on, with Taso in his car headed home. After the fourth card was turned up (5-8-K-5), I said to myself, “It will be a split pot if a face card is turned up.” A face card, a jack, was turned up, and I announced out loud (several times) that it was a split pot. But, at that point, no one heard me.

I had never in my life met Taso Lazarou. I thought I was doing the right thing. Moreover, this hand was being covered by a lot of cameras and press. Can you imagine what they would have done to the image of poker if this mistake hadn’t been rectified?

Had I done the right thing? To a person, everyone said yes, but still I wasn’t sure. I felt really terrible that I had interfered in the WSOP, but if Taso had been eliminated in this way, I would have felt that he had been cheated (and I can’t abide cheating).

I was happy that T. J. Cloutier turned to me and said, “Of course you did the right thing.” Especially since, two hands later, Taso moved all-in for \$30,000 with Js-7s and T. J. called him with A-9. The board came down A-7-4-2-J (another jack on the river for Taso!) and I had already cost T. J. \$30,000 by opening my mouth. Of course, things would have worked out perfectly (for me and my guilt) if Taso had missed the jack or the seven on the river. He would have finished

18th anyway, and I wouldn't have had to worry about what happened next.

I was already getting knots in my stomach and considered just leaving the room for a few minutes when in the very next hand Taso moved all-in for \$90,000 with J-J against Buddy Pitcock's 9-9. You don't know how hard I was rooting for a nine so that this sense of guilt would back down and Taso could finish 18th (again!). Taso won the pot and now, within two minutes, I had cost T. J. \$30,000 and Buddy \$90,000. Considered another way, of course, I had rightfully won Taso \$30,000 and \$90,000. Taso then had over \$200,000 in chips.

Within the next nine hands, two players were eliminated at the other table, and Taso was moved to that table. From then on, I saw Taso move up to over \$300,000 in chips, but he didn't seem to really hurt anyone from then on. After Buddy was eliminated about 45 minutes later, I apologized to him, in case he thought I had done the wrong thing. He said, "Phil, you absolutely did the right thing." He then asked me to sign an autograph for his son, who was in military school (and apparently doing quite well). The fact that Buddy supported me in what I did made me feel a lot better, and I began to forget the whole thing.

Do cards "read" when they are sitting on the table faceup or not? Should spectators be allowed to assist the tournament directors when a mistake has been made? I know that most high-limit players at the Bellagio like the fact that cards don't read in their game. (If you have the winning hand, they *will not* say anything, even though your hand is faceup on the table.) I was taught in poker that cards read if they are sitting faceup on the table, and I have always called the winning hand in such a case. I guess the lines are drawn now, and I will always tell someone when they have the winning hand, if it is sitting faceup on the table.

For the record, I felt I was on the side of justice, and I continue to feel that I did the right thing.

THE WEIRDEST AND BIGGEST POT OF MY LIFE — SO FAR

There can be only one World Champion of Poker each year. This winner will be called a World Champion for the rest of his or her life—not ex-World Champion, but simply World Champion of Poker. Every poker tournament that he or she plays in, and every card room that he or she ever visits, will call him or her a World Champion of Poker. This person will have his or her picture on the World Champion of Poker walls for the rest of eternity, and will win at least \$2.5 million for first place (that was the figure in 2003).

In golf, there are four majors a year; in poker, we have just one, although in 2004 the World Poker Tour's \$25,000 buy-in Tour Championship is a solid second major. All of the poker players that I know dream of winning the World Champion of Poker title, and therefore securing their place in poker history. In fact, for many of my fellow poker players, and for me, the worst poker day of our poker year is the day when we are eliminated from the World Series of Poker.

In 2001, Carlos Mortensen arrived at the WSOP's final table after a grueling four days of play with over \$1 million in chips. I made it there as well, for the first time since I won the event in 1989. Joining Carlos and me at the final table were Dewey Tomko, Mike Matusow, Phil Gordon, John Inashima, Henry Nowakowski, Steve "Country" Riehle, and Stan Schrier. Joining the nine of us at the final table of the WSOP were 1,200 spectators, two live Internet broadcasts (see www.philhellmuth.com for the archived broadcast), dozens of reporters, and 10 different cameras covering the players and table for the Travel Channel. With a battery of electronic equipment for the Travel Channel, a room full of spectators, and lots of spectacular bluffs from the players, that electric final table was the most exciting environment I had ever played in.

I hadn't played at Carlos's table at all during the previous four days, but that was about to change, as we finally met at the final table on the fifth day. The play at the final table that mystical day was erratic and spectacular. One pot, Henry Nowakowski smooth-called



Phil ran up \$675 to more than \$1 million at the 2001 WSOP before finishing fifth.

a \$20,000 bet with pocket kings. Then Carlos raised the pot to \$120,000 to go with A-Q, and Mike Matusow made it \$500,000 to go with 2-7 off suit!

Imagine, Mike made it \$500,000 to go with 2-7 off suit, which is generally considered to be the worst-possible starting hand in Hold'em poker! Risking \$500,000 on a pure bluff takes a lot of guts, but sometimes discretion is the better part of valor. Of course, Henry called Mike's \$500,000 bet with pocket kings, and won a \$1,100,000 pot.

Another hand, Mike made it \$100,000 to go, and then called Phil Gordon's \$400,000 raise (in a heartbeat!) with A-10 off suit. Mike made a fantastic call with the A-10, because Phil had only A-7! With all of the brilliant and erratic fireworks and megabluffs surrounding him, Dewey Tomko quietly played his more conservative style, and slowly began to accumulate chips.

With five players left in the 2003 World Series of Poker, the following hand came up between Carlos Mortensen and me. I was second in chips and feeling pretty good about things when I decided to call the \$30,000 blind with Q-10. Dewey, Phil G., Carlos, and Stan all called my \$30,000 bet. The flop came down Qs-9h-4s. With about \$160,000 in the pot, Carlos and Stan checked to me, and I bet a mere \$60,000. Dewey and Phil G. folded, and then Carlos made it \$260,000 to go, which was a \$200,000 raise.

Stan then studied for about two minutes (which in poker is an eternity, especially under those circumstances) as I observed both him and Carlos. As it turned out, Stan didn't even know he had a hand sitting in front of him—he thought he had folded a minute before. When he realized that we were all waiting for him to act and that he had a live hand, he instantly apologized and threw his hand away. Stan is a really good guy, and it was all just a simple mistake.

While I was waiting for Stan to act, I was spending all of my time studying Carlos, because I already knew that if Stan put a chip into this pot, then I was going to fold my hand. Carlos looked really nervous to me, as we both sat and waited while (we thought) Stan contemplated his next move. Suddenly, I began to think two

things at once. First, I thought that Carlos had Q-J, which had me beat, and that it would be hard for him to call my \$650,000 reraise, if I indeed raised all of my chips.

My second thought was one I don't remember ever having before in my life. I thought, "Is it time to go home?" I had been waiting for 12 years for the chance to win the World Series of Poker again; I had visualized it and seen it happen many times in my mind over the years. I thought to myself, "I'm not going anywhere; I think I probably have Carlos beat, but even if he does have Q-J, he will fold it for a \$650,000 raise right now."

I then moved all of my chips into the middle of the pot, and Carlos began to think. "Perfect," I thought. "If he's thinking, then he doesn't have two pair or trips. I think he'll fold, and I will win this pot." Then Carlos said, "Count." Then the dealer said, "Call," and I flipped my hand faceup just as Carlos said, "Wait a minute. I didn't say call, I said count!" Oh my God, oh my God! I had just shown my hand to Carlos for free, in the biggest pot of my life! But I covered it up very quickly. I'm not 100 percent sure whether Carlos saw my hand or not (it would have been hard for him to miss it), but if he had, then it just wasn't my year to win the WSOP.

In all of my 19 years of watching and playing poker, I have never seen anyone flip up their hand while the other player was still thinking. It was bizarre, and it was definitely my fault (more like my stupidity). If he did see my hand, then fate (or something like that) had intervened to stop me from winning my second "Big One" at the WSOP. If he did see my hand, then I just figured that some great power somewhere had said, "Phil, I am going to take this one away from you, but don't worry about it, because I have given you so much in life."

I would also like to believe that things happen for a reason, and that this great power had plans for me to win the WSOP again soon. If Carlos didn't see my hand, then he made one hell of a call with his Q-J, and either way, he definitely deserved to win the 2001 WSOP. Carlos played spectacular poker that day, and that's why he is the 2001 World Champion of Poker. After Carlos called my \$650,000

raise, the next card was a jack (for Q-9-4-J), which gave me any eight or any king to make a straight and win the pot. The last card was an ace, and it was all over for me.

Five straight days of playing and 12 years of dreaming were gone in as long as it took that ace to hit the table in front of my eyes. After I was eliminated, I was as dejected as I have ever been in my life. Which makes me realize how lucky I am, in so many other respects. After all, it's just poker—or at least that's what I keep telling myself!

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World Series of Poker Hands

Everyone in the poker world knows that the World Series of Poker (WSOP) is the place to win poker tournaments. If you want history, prestige, and money, then win some WSOP tournaments. If you want to reach poker greatness, go to the WSOP. If you want to play against the best, go to the WSOP. Statistics since 1971 are meticulously kept at the WSOP. Stats like most money won, most wins, most cashes (times in the money), and most final tables. Every beginning player aspires to win just one bracelet there.

Lately, the World Poker Tour has been making a charge up the prestige-and-money scale (appearing on TV with huge prize pools doesn't hurt!). I love the WPT, and I want to win a bunch of WPT titles. Soon, the WPT may even pass the WSOP in stature, but right now give me the WSOP!

DING! CHAN VERSUS HELLMUTH, ROUND FOUR

In 1989, the amazing Johnny Chan and I played heads-up for the World Series of Poker's world championships and its first prize of \$755,000. At the time, I was a young, up-and-coming professional poker player, pursuing my dream of winning the WSOP. I beat Johnny to become the youngest World Champion, at the tender age of 24. Johnny was also playing for history, because he had a chance to win the WSOP three years in a row. What a feat that would have been! My hat's off to Johnny for winning it two years in a row and finishing second the third time around. In fact, Johnny's back-to-back firsts and second in 1987, 1988, and 1989, respectively, is one of the greatest feats in poker history.

A few months later, in 1989, in a heads-up match-play event (think brackets, like the NCAA tournament) at the Bicycle Club, Johnny and I each won our first three matches, which put us heads-up for round four (*our* round two) in the semifinals. That time, the game was limit Hold'em, and we had quite a crowd watching us. I remember that I had Johnny way down in chips, and that he came back and beat me anyway.

Then, in 1998, at the Rio's Carnivale of Poker, Johnny and I beat the rest of the field (over 300 players) in a limit Hold'em event to face off heads-up for the third time. This time we played for over an hour at 5:00 A.M. to a standoff, and agreed to split the prize money (we didn't even play it out), so that we could get some sleep for the next day's no-limit Hold'em event. (I was impressed when I walked by the final table the next day at 5:00 A.M. and saw Johnny there with a ton of chips, despite the fact that he hadn't had much time to sleep.)

In the 2002 WSOP's Gold Bracelet Heads-up Match Play event, I won four matches to make the finals and squared off with . . . you guessed it, Johnny Chan. That time around (round four), Johnny was the all-time career leader in money won at the WSOP with more than \$3 million in earnings, and I was third on the list with about \$2.8 million. (T. J. Cloutier was about \$60,000 ahead of me. I had

started the 2002 WSOP, one month earlier, first on the list.) I had a chance to win my eighth WSOP bracelet and tie Doyle Brunson and Johnny Moss for the all-time WSOP win lead. At the same time, Johnny had a chance to win number seven and tie me for second place in WSOP wins.

With a lot of history, but not too much money, at stake, we began the no-limit Hold'em match with \$40,000 each in chips and the blinds at \$100–\$200. With over 200 spectators present, with all the lights, and with TV cameras recording the match, Johnny came out swinging, as I knew he would. I was content to let him dictate the pace, and to wait for him to overplay his hands when I was holding stronger hands. That's exactly what happened. Johnny stole a ton of pots, but I kept nailing him in the bigger pots.

Finally, about 40 minutes into the match, we were even, and he changed strategies. He started to play a lot less aggressively.

Up until this point, I had been playing my best game, but now I began to lose control. I believe this happened because I had just been eliminated the day before (day three) in the WSOP main event, and I hadn't slept much in the previous four days. (No surprise. No one sleeps well during the main event, if they sleep at all.) I just didn't play my A game, but be that as it may, Johnny was playing great and may have just crushed my A game anyway. Johnny made four final tables at the 2002 WSOP, and he was definitely on *his* A game.

I hadn't been doing any bluffing in my heads-up matches up to this point, but then I changed strategies and tried to bluff Johnny in a big way. About 40 minutes into our match, I called Johnny's \$500 raise with 10h-6h. The flop came down Ad-Qd-7s, and I checked. Then Johnny bet out \$1,000. I was reading pretty well after five weeks of playing poker, and I smelled some weakness. I felt that Johnny didn't have an ace, and that if he didn't have an ace, I could take the pot away from him. Bluffing after the flop really isn't my style, but I decided to try to take this pot away from Johnny.

I then check-raised his \$1,000 bet, by \$2,000 more, making it \$3,000 to go. Johnny studied me awhile and called the bet. When

a 2c made the board Ad-Qd-7s-2c, I decided not to dog it, and I bluffed out \$6,000. After a moment, Johnny called the \$6,000. When the last card was an ace, for a board of Ad-Qd-7s-2c-Ah, I fired out one more time (only \$4,000 this time, though) in case Johnny had nothing (perhaps he had a straight draw and a flush draw like 10d-Jd or 10d-Kd). Johnny said, “All right, I call.” I said, “You got it,” and then he flipped up his K-K. I was right, he was a little weak! He didn’t have an ace, but he had called me down anyway.

Although I had read Johnny well, he had also read me well. I had forgotten the cardinal rule of poker: “Don’t bluff the great players.” Just because you correctly read that someone is weak doesn’t mean you will get them to fold their hand, especially in the case of Johnny Chan (Erik Seidel is also great at smelling weakness). Johnny said, “I thought you had a pair of sevens and a flush draw.” I said, “Nope, actually I had the 10d-Jd. Where was the king, so that we could end this thing?” Although I never lie outside of poker, to me, lying about what you just had in a poker hand is part of bluffing. Why give someone a “free read” on your play?

After that hand, I was down to \$28,000, but I wasn’t worried. I still thought I would win. I knew I wouldn’t try to bluff Johnny again, but now I felt he owed me at least \$100,000 worth of calls when I had the better hand. My bluff had set up his calling me down when I had a strong hand. Whenever someone makes a call like that on me, I always seem to beat them for a lot of chips later on. Perhaps it’s because they have that one bluff sticking in their mind.

Since Johnny was now playing less aggressively, it was time to test his nonaggressive game. I made up my mind to switch gears and start raising and reraising a lot. (I rarely play like that heads-up, but then I felt that I knew what Johnny had in his hand every hand. And I wanted to mess with his head a bit, and get him used to calling big bets with weak hands both before and after the flop.)

The following hand then came up: I opened for \$700 on the button with J-9. Johnny called that and raised \$1,500 more. I called that in the spirit of “it’s time to play/outplay” this guy. It turned out that calling here was a fatal mistake. First of all, it’s not my style to play

these kinds of hands, but I was going to mess with him a bit. The flop was K-J-9 rainbow (meaning no flush draws), and Johnny bet out \$2,000. I then mulled over my options. I knew that Johnny would play all-in with me with K-Q, K-10, A-K, A-A, or maybe even with Q-Q. I studied Johnny, but he kept still and quiet (no read yet). Should I smooth-call his \$2,000 or raise right here? What to do?

He couldn't have reraised me with K-J or K-9 or Q-10, I was pretty sure of that. Unless he had trips, I felt I had him. Finally, I raised \$6,000, making it \$8,000 to go. Now Johnny looked me right in the eyes, and I saw "the nuts" in his eyes as clearly as I had seen it in Humberto Brenes's eyes when he had two aces before the flop in Tunica, Mississippi, and I mucked my 6-6 for his raise. I saw it as clearly as I had at the Commerce Casino when Steve "Country" Riehle had K-K and I mucked my 10-10 for a single pre-flop raise.

Johnny had K-K in the hole, and this match was over! What a mistake I made when I called Johnny within two seconds of his saying, "I'm all-in." If I had thought for just a minute and acted on my read, then I might have been able to save my last \$18,000 to battle on with. I suppose that when I raised the \$6,000, I had committed myself to this hand in my mind. In any case, it was a difficult hand to get away from, and it would have required a strong read on Johnny by me if I was going to lay it down.

If I had just called his \$2,000 bet, then I might have gotten a strong read on Johnny on fourth street and saved some money. Although I don't think I could have folded my hand on fourth street when a five came off, I could have folded on the end after the second five hit, because by then I couldn't even beat Q-Q.

Was I unlucky to flop two pair when Johnny flopped a set of kings? Definitely, no doubt about it. But I could have folded pre-flop, or even folded on the flop for the reraise, or just called on the flop and fourth street. (By the way, folding here would have been a great laydown!)

All I know is that my worst two poker days of the year 2002 fell back-to-back, when I lost Ah-Kh to Qc-10c all-in before the

flop for \$220,000 in the WSOP (see page 41) and then lost with J-9 on the K-J-9 flop to Johnny's pocket K-K. With the WSOP loss on Wednesday and the Chan loss on Thursday, having my head shaved on the ESPN coverage on Friday was fun in comparison! (See page 44.)

That's the problem with playing hands like J-9 for a reraise: you often get yourself in trouble. Even when you really "hit" the flop like I did, you're still in danger. (But I'm looking forward to Chan versus Hellmuth, round five!)

NOEL FURLONG VERSUS HUCK SEED

The following spectacular and mind-numbing hand pitted Huck Seed against Noel Furlong at the 1999 World Series of Poker's final table. In 1999, Huck Seed was arguably the best no-limit Hold'em player in the world. Huck was listed ahead of all of us on the odds sheet that year. By the way, another of the world's best no-limit Hold'em players, Erik Seidel, was at the table as well.



Huck Seed with Bono at the final table of the 1996 WSOP.

Anyway, I bet \$4,000 on Huck to win going into the last day at 4.75 to 1. With six players left on the final day of the WSOP, Huck Seed doubled his \$400,000 to over \$800,000 in the first 10 minutes of play. I really thought he was on his way to the title when he doubled up so early. Within 20 minutes of the start of play, the following hand came up.

With the blinds at \$10,000–\$20,000 and the antes at \$3,000 a hand, Huck “just” called \$20,000. Noel Furlong then raised \$80,000, making it \$100,000 to go on the button. When it was Huck’s turn to act, he said, “I’m all in.” The crowd noise rose, because everyone knew that Huck had just called the \$80,000 and reraised over \$700,000. But even before the gasps began, Noel—with \$1.5 million in chips—calmly said, “I call.” Noel had decided to call Huck in less than one second. Huck then said, “Good call.”

The noise level was way up now, especially after the hands were turned faceup. Huck had Jd-8d and Noel had Ah-3h! I heard someone say, “I wouldn’t expect to see such junk in even a super satellite, let alone the WSOP.” Good point. Even in a super satellite (a \$100 buy-in tournament with rebuys), I never see such weak hands put in all the money. What the heck happened here?

One unnoticed fact was that Noel had been on Huck’s left for three straight days. Huck told me, late on day three, that Noel hadn’t let him make a move in two days. Huck was very leery of Noel, but expected Noel to make a mistake soon enough. Noel had confided to his friends, “I haven’t let that guy breathe in two days.” Everyone expected them to play a big pot eventually, because they were two of the most aggressive guys at the table.

At first glance, it looks like Huck’s play was weak. Why risk all of your chips against a loose cannon like Noel with no hand? But wait a minute! Hadn’t Huck correctly read Noel as being weak? In fact, Noel’s hand was so weak that it looks as if—at first glance, anyway—he made a worse call with his \$700,000. In fact, Huck Seed had made a great move to raise all of his chips in this spot. The only thing that he hadn’t counted on was that Noel had read Huck as well as Huck had read Noel.

Why would you want to call a \$700,000 reraise with the Ah-3h? The problem with that hand, of course, is that you are in bad shape if your opponent has a real hand. You're a 2.5-to-1 underdog if Huck has a pair over twos, or even A-K or A-big. Even if your opponent is bluffing with, say, a K-Q, you are still only about a 3-to-2 favorite in this spot. Why not just fold and wait for a better spot?

Give Noel a lot of credit. He knew that Huck was bluffing, and that he might not get a better spot to play a pot against Huck the rest of the tournament. Huck Seed is a great player who won't give anyone too many openings. Noel took the one opening he had had against Huck in two days. He simply called.

After a lot of thought on the hand, I realized that I wouldn't have called Huck even if I knew he was bluffing. I believe I would want to get down to the final two or three players before really playing any huge pots, especially when I was holding over \$1.5 million in chips. But I'm assuming that I, too, am among the best no-limit Hold'em tournament players in the world today. With that mindset, I don't mind folding the best hand, because I think I would win the tournament later anyway.

If you assume that Huck is a better no-limit Hold'em player than Noel, then Noel made a great call. Why not just be 3-to-2 favorite over Huck for all his money and perhaps get rid of him right then and there? Thus, I believe that Noel Furlong made a great call. With a flop of A-Q-3, it was all over for Huck, and Noel took his commanding chip lead "all the way."

In fact, I was really impressed with the way Noel moved his chips and made his decisions the last two days of the WSOP. It is really something to watch a World Champion at the top of his game. It seemed as if he was never really in trouble at any time during the last three days of the tournament, and that's the way to win the WSOP.

T. J.'S WSOP HAND

The 1998 World Series of Poker at Binion's Horseshoe saw a particularly interesting hand between Kevin McBride and T. J. Cloutier.



T. J. Cloutier with his Hall of Fame watch and WSOP poker bracelet.

In my view, T. J. is one of the best poker tournament players ever. His fine record over the 1990s makes him a serious candidate for poker tournament player of the decade, and he is an obvious candidate for the Poker Hall of Fame.

There were three players left in the tournament when this hand came up. The blinds were \$5,000–\$10,000, and the ante was \$2,000. Scotty Nguyen folded his hand on the button, and Kevin McBride opened for \$40,000 (a \$30,000 raise) out of the small blind, holding Js-9s. T. J. called the \$40,000 and raised \$130,000 with Kh-Qc. Kevin then called the \$130,000, and the flop came 2s-5h-6s. Kevin checked, and T. J. moved all-in for about \$400,000. After a brief pause, Kevin called, and the cards were flipped up for the cameras and the spectators.

Even before the fourth card was turned up, T. J. began to reach for his coat. Sure enough, the Jh came off, and now T. J. needed a queen or a king that wasn't a spade (four outs) to stay alive in the WSOP. But the river was a blank (try saying "The river was a blank" to someone who doesn't know poker!), and T. J. was sent up to the camera booth with over \$400,000 for his third-place finish.

What happened here? I don't mind Kevin's initial opening of \$40,000 with Js-9s, and I like T. J.'s raise of \$130,000 with Kh-Qc, because he probably read Kevin as being weak. But I really *don't* like Kevin's call of T. J.'s \$130,000 raise with Js-9s. T. J. had been playing really tight, and Kevin had to know that T. J. had his own hand beat pre-flop. I believe that the call there with Js-9s was just asking for trouble.

Much worse than this \$130,000 call was Kevin's check on the flop. What was he hoping to flop? Turns out that he flopped really well to his hand (a flush draw and two overcards), but then check-called a \$400,000 bet? Huh? If you're going to call an all-in bet with a jack-high drawing hand, then, of course, you should bet it, and pray to God that you don't get called. If Kevin bets the \$400,000, then he wins the hand right there, without having to make anything. I don't mind T. J.'s all-in \$400,000 bet on the flop. His bet would

make Kevin fold any ace-rag after the flop, or even a better hand than that, like two sevens or A-J. So he would win the pot against all bad hands, like J-9 off suit. Could Kevin fold his hand after the flop? I don't think so; once he sees the flop, he's committed. (I happened to be doing the commentary during that hand, and I guess I was a bit harsh, but I was truthful. I usually don't have a problem with telling it the way it is!)

By the way, Scotty Nguyen played beautiful poker that day on his way to the 1998 World Championship of Poker. Scotty was drinking Michelob beer that day, much to the dismay of a bottled-water company that was sponsoring the WSOP in 1998. Michelob did take notice, however, and paid Scotty to endorse Michelob the rest of the year. This led to Men Nguyen drinking Corona beer at the final table of the Tournament of Champions in 1999. Had Men won it, perhaps Corona would have come knocking on *his* door!

The fourth-place finisher in the 1998 WSOP was an old friend of mine named Dewey Weum. Dewey had a pretty impressive record in the WSOP from 1993 to 1998. He made the money four out of five years during that stretch. Even though I had won five world championships by 1993, many players in Madison, Wisconsin, thought I was the third-best poker player in Madison! From what they had seen, I was third behind Dewey Weum and Gary Miller. Gary and Dewey outplayed me in the small pot-limit games we had in Madison. But how do you ignore five (now nine) WSOP bracelets? It just goes to show you that the hardest place to get respect is where you live!

MY \$220,000 POT AT THE WORLD SERIES OF POKER

In 2002, after remaining positive through a bad World Series of Poker, I was ready to win the Championship Event and the accompanying \$2 million first prize. Monday and Tuesday I played as well as I could play, and I caught a lot of big hands as well. I went smoothly

(Cadillac smooth) from \$10,000 right up to \$127,000 without ever being low on chips or even close to all-in. I really thought that moving from 130 players down to 45 players on day three would be a walk in the park.

Hello, Meng La! Wow, I had never met Meng “Over the Top” La before, but he was seated just to my left on day three, and believe me, this guy makes Stu Ungar look like a slow player! On the first hand, I opened for \$4,000 with the Ad-Qd, and Meng raised \$10,000 more. Had I known how wild and crazy Meng La played, I would have stuffed his remaining \$25,000 in the pot pronto! Instead, I made a very easy fold, and the game was on. Meng proceeded to raise or reraise me 12 times that day, and he raised, reraised, or moved all-in almost 20 times in the first two hours. He never folded a hand once he put a chip in! How he survived that first two hours playing that fast is a mystery to me. Usually, when someone plays that fast against me I bust them by about the fifth move in or so. Be that as it may, I felt pretty certain that I would eventually bust Meng; all I needed was time. He was a thorn in my side, but eventually his chips would look pretty rosy in my stack.

Despite Meng’s onslaught, I still had \$117,000 with 60 players left when the following hand came up. A player I had never seen before, named Robert Varkonyi, had come to our table. Immediately, I had a good read on him (reading people is my biggest strength in poker). With the blinds at \$1,200–\$2,400 and the antes at \$400 a player, Robert raised the pot to \$8,000 to go, and I looked down at Ah-Kh. I felt that Robert was weak, so I raised it \$17,000 more. Now Robert immediately announced, “I’m all-in.” I asked for a count, and it turned out that he had \$81,400 more (\$106,400 total).

With \$56,000 already in the pot, I had a decision to make, but my mind kept screaming, “He has nothing, you have to call because you know you have the best hand.” It was almost as if I really did know that he had nothing, and one part of my mind said, “Now is the time, when you’re a 2.2-to-1 favorite.” (I thought he

had A-something). After less than a minute, I called, and he flipped up Qc-10c as if he were proud of his hand! For the \$220,000 pot, I thought I was only a 2-to-1 favorite (actually, it turns out that I was only a 3-to-2 favorite here). What had I done? I had avoided all big pots for three days, and now I was only a 3-to-2 favorite for the money. If I had kept that \$81,000 (plus the \$11,000 more that I still had left after Robert), then I believe I would have easily made the final 45 players, and probably without playing a big pot. In fact, I may have flopped a set against someone with top pair, and been a huge favorite in a big pot, or perhaps I would have made a flush and had my opponent drawing dead.

So here's the final analysis: I made a bad call, even though I was sure he was bluffing. But where do you draw the line? Do you fold when you feel you're a 2.5-to-1 favorite and the pot's laying you 7 to 4? My call was bad because I could still have won the tourney handily had I not made it (because I would have had \$92,000), whereas, by losing the pot to Robert, I had made coming back from \$11,000 very difficult.

I don't like Robert's play here at all. Why would he risk all of his money with no hand against someone who is known for reading players well? Why not wait a mere 10 minutes for a better hand or a better spot? To me, he had an easy fold, but moved all-in instead. Robert made some blunders along the way, but he made up for it with the beautiful way he played the final table, and he won the 2002 WSOP.

I love the fact that anyone can play in the WSOP. I love the fact that they keep the field open. But with open fields come more obstacles to winning. In 2002, for the third year in a row, I was the last World Champion remaining in the WSOP, but that doesn't pay the rent. I do wish I had waited until I had someone drawing almost dead before I committed most of my stack to a pot. I wish the flop hadn't come down A-Q-10 for Robert to beat my Ah-Kh with his Qc-10c and two pair. I just wish winning the WSOP wasn't so hard!

But then it wouldn't be the WSOP, would it?

PHIL'S CLOSE HAIRCUT, FOR FREE, ON ESPN

I knew the ramifications of what I was saying. I knew that the viewing public would perceive my statement as sour grapes. Oh well, I said it anyway. I just didn't think that it would come to this!

While I was helping Gabe Kaplan with the ESPN commentary during the last day of the World Series of Poker (WSOP) in 2002, I put my foot in my mouth, way deep in my mouth. Robert Varkonyi (who had eliminated me two days before) had just lost \$400,000 of his last \$640,000 with 9-9 versus Julian Gardner's A-A (all-in before the flop) on the first hand. And I hated Robert's play here with 9-9. So I just opened my mouth and blurted it out.

It seemed pretty safe to say, especially at that moment, so I said, "If Robert Varkonyi wins the WSOP, I'll shave my head." The executive producer, sensing some added drama, said, "Repeat what you just said." I felt like backing off, but I thought, "What are the chances that this comment makes the final cut on ESPN to make me look bad, anyway? I mean, Robert has to win first place by climbing his way up from \$240,000 in chips for this remark to make the cut." So I repeated the statement for the ESPN commentary.

The players were told what I had said, and I looked at Robert right then, and he seemed to bristle a bit. I thought, "Oh no, I may have lit a fire under him!" I don't know if that was the case or not, but I do know that Robert began to play better than anyone else in the field from that moment forward. He did manage to hold off an ace or a king when John Shipley moved all-in with A-K versus Robert's J-J, but he pretty much dominated the final table play after that. He was only all-in one other time, when he put in \$1 million before the flop with J-J versus John Shipley's A-J. After that pot, Robert steadily increased his chip lead until he had a stranglehold on the rest of the players.

With four players left, and the blinds at \$15,000–\$30,000, Robert opened for \$100,000 with Q-10 (the same hand that he busted me out with versus my Ah-Kh in that memorable pot two days earlier). When Scott Gray moved all-in for \$250,000 more with A-9, Robert

called, saying, “This is Phil’s favorite hand [a reference to the beat he put on me], so I call.” I don’t like his call here at all. But with a flop of Q-Q-8, Q-10 really was my favorite hand! The turn card brought a nine and the river brought an ace, both of which hit Scott’s A-9, but it wasn’t enough to beat three queens.

Now they were down to three players, and the first hand after a fifteen-minute TV timeout was spectacular. Julian Gardner opened the pot for \$100,000 on the button. Ralph Perry raised, making it \$300,000 to go from the small blind, and then Robert moved all-in (\$4 million!) from the big blind. Julian flashed his hand to me when he folded it: it was 10-10. Ralph decided to call with his J-J, and Robert had A-A in the big blind! This was one of the most exciting (and cold-blooded) hands in WSOP history. In two hands, Robert had eliminated two players, and now he faced Julian with \$5 million in chips to Julian’s \$1.3 million in chips.

After only 10 more minutes, the blinds were up to \$20,000–\$40,000, and that’s when the following hand came up. Robert made it only \$80,000 to go on the button with Q-10 (that hand again!), and Julian called in the big blind with Jc-8c, and the flop came down 4c-4d-Qc. Now Julian checked, and Robert bet out a relatively small \$50,000. Julian decided to move all-in for \$900,000 total (an \$850,000 raise), and Robert announced, “I call.”

Now the hands were flipped faceup, and the fourth card was a ten. With \$2 million in the pot, tournament director Matt Savage (Matt did a great job throughout the whole WSOP) now announced, “Julian needs a club or a nine.” Not exactly, Matt, what about the last card, which actually was a club, but still didn’t win the pot for Julian? How about the 10c on the river, which allowed Robert to immortalize Q-10 with a full house (tens full of queens) and beat Julian’s jack-high flush with a final board of 4c-4d-Qc-10s-10c. What a great last card; both players made a big hand! Right after they turned the 10c on the river, the crowd started chanting, “Shave Phil’s head, shave Phil’s head. . . .”

Of course, Becky Behnan had made sure that someone had some barber’s equipment on hand, and I am a man of my word. I would

have loved to avoid the head shave, but I certainly deserved what I had coming, and I knew it! First Robert, followed by Becky Behnan, Andy Glazer, David “Devilfish” Ulliott, and then some others, took turns shaving my head in front of a roomful of spectators, press, and cameras. Although the sideshow spectacle of my having my head shaved by Robert (who was very gracious and tried to let me out of the affront) before thousands of people was, apparently, very entertaining for those watching, it was Robert’s day.

Robert played magnificent poker while he dominated the final table at the tournament. Congratulations to Robert Varkonyi, the 2002 World Champion of Poker.

The ESPN coverage, which has been run hundreds of times, even two years later, ended with assorted other people shaving my head. Oh well, they tell me that “any press is good press.”

DAN HARRINGTON’S BIG BREAK?

I’ll never forget what happened to Dan Harrington at the 1995 WSOP. Up until that time, Dan hadn’t put much energy into playing tournaments, and was primarily known for playing really tight in the no-limit Hold’em side games. This all changed, though, in 1995.

Dan was headed home to Los Angeles when at the last minute he entered and won a super satellite for the WSOP, giving him the \$10,000 buy-in seat for the “Big One.” It would be starting on Monday, and since Dan was already going to stay in Vegas to play the Big One, he decided that he might as well play in the \$2,500 buy-in no-limit Hold’em tournament on Friday.

With about seven tables left in Friday’s event, I happened to be at Dan’s table and witnessed the following hand. I have often wondered what historical implications this hand held for Dan. After all, not only did he end up winning this most interesting hand, he then proceeded to win Friday’s poker tournament (his first WSOP victory), and then went on to win the World Championship that year. If Dan had lost this pot, would he have then won the 1995 WSOP? In

any case, history would have taken a different path; and momentum can be a strong thing. All of history can change with a single flip of a card. Just ask T. J. Cloutier and Chris “Jesus” Ferguson!

Now that you know Dan won this hand, let’s talk about what happened, and how the hand came up. With the blinds at \$100–\$200 and a \$25 ante, player A opened the pot for \$600 with J-J in early position. Player B called the raise with 8-8 in late position, and then Dan called the \$600 and raised about \$2,000 more with Ad-Jd. Player A knew how tight Dan played (Dan had a reputation for playing supertight poker), and because of this he threw away his pocket jacks right then and there. Player B decided to call Dan’s \$2,000 raise.

The flop came 9-6-2, and then Dan moved all-in for about \$6,500. Player B made a great call with his 8-8, and showed his pocket eights faceup. Dan nodded as if to say, “That’s good.” The next card off was a three, and then the river was the last jack in the deck, giving Dan a pair of jacks and the winning hand.

As Ted Forrest would say, “What the heck is going on?” Think about the sequence of events that had to occur for Dan to come out on top! First of all, Dan had to reraise with a relatively weak Ad-Jd. Second, player A had to fold his pocket jacks. Third, player B had to call the raise with pocket eights. Fourth, Dan had to move all-in with absolutely nothing on the flop. Fifth, player B had to call Dan’s all-in bet. And finally, Dan had to catch the miracle card to win the pot—his outs were one jack and three aces (he was about a 5-to-1 underdog). Add to all of the above the fact that Dan then went on to win his first major poker tournament that day, and then proceeded to win the Big One.

From leaving town, to winning a super satellite, to winning this crazy pot, to winning the \$2,500 buy-in no-limit Hold’em event on Friday, and finally, to winning the World Championship the following Thursday. Wow, what a parlay! I don’t exactly know what happened that hand or that week. Was it fate? Was it coincidence? Who knows? I do believe this much: if Dan had lost that pot (which would have eliminated him from Friday’s tournament), I don’t believe he

would have won the World Championship that year. One pot, one card, and the rest, as they say, is history. What a chain of events. Maybe it's just life—*c'est la vie!*

1994 WSOP PRELIMINARY NO-LIMIT HOLD'EM

In 1996, two years after this tournament wound up, I was giving George Rodis a hard time about what he had done to me in this event, when George looked me squarely in the eye and said, "Phil, take a good look around this room. Don't you think I deserve to have a WSOP [World Series of Poker] bracelet?"

There was a lot of action that day in 1994 at the WSOP. When we were down to five players, Bob Lohr came up to me and said, "Phil, play good, I have a bet on you to win it." I asked Bob how much he had bet on me and he replied (in his high-pitched Texas twang), "Well, I bet O'Neil Longson \$1,500 at 80 to 1 on you to win only. Let's see, if you win it, I win \$120,000, so like I said, play good!"

I had also bet Ted Forrest, Huck Seed, and Yosh Nakano my \$5,000 to their \$8,000 each (my \$15,000 to their \$24,000) that I would win a WSOP bracelet in 1994. I mean, why not take 8 to 5? I had won three WSOP bracelets the year before!

Doyle Brunson told me the next day that he had bet \$25,000 on me to win that night as well. I know they were all in the Binion's Horseshoe card room that night, all except a depressed O'Neil, who was up in his room (true story). I guess the game he had been playing in was too small to hold his attention!

When we hit three-handed, I had roughly \$240,000 in chips, the tough-playing Howard Lederer had \$160,000 in chips, and the tough-playing George Rodis had \$80,000 in chips. One hand, George limped in on the small blind, and I raised it up a little bit with Qs-Js in the big blind. George then reraised all of his chips, so I folded. A little while later, George limped in on the small blind again, and I raised it up out of the big blind with an A-7. George then reraised all of his chips, so I folded again.

About 10 minutes later, George limped in a third time, and I raised again (with nothing), and he moved all-in again. I might be a bit slow at times, but didn't I detect a pattern here? George loves to limp in with whatever, wait for my raise, and then move all-in before the flop. OK, I decided that I wouldn't raise it up again—after George limped in—unless I could call the reraise of all of his chips. So the waiting game began.

About an hour later, George limped in on the button. I looked down and saw A-A in the small blind, and I already knew what was going to happen here. It was as clear as day. I would raise, and George would reraise all-in: game, set, and match! Thus, I decided to raise enough money to make sure that Howard, in the big blind, got out of the way. Howard folded and then *boom*, there came George's roughly \$80,000 sailing into the middle of the pot.

In an instant, I had my hand turned faceup as I pushed all of my \$240,000 into the middle of the pot. I'm not kidding when I tell you that the speed of my move, combined with the A-A that I showed George, literally made George's friend Mike Alsaadi fall out of his chair behind George. A rather depressed-looking George Rodis then flipped up his K-10 off suit.

So now I had \$320,000 in chips and Howard had \$160,000. Great! Of course, there remained the small formality of flipping the five cards up in the middle of the table. By the way, first place was about \$220,000, second place was about \$110,000, and third place was about \$55,000—and I was the defending champion in this event. There came the flop, J-J-10. Not too bad, I thought; George only has two outs (two tens left in the deck to hit). But the turn card was his miracle ten. Excuse me? Surely an ace is coming on the river. But no, the river was some small card, and now we all had \$160,000 in chips.

Howard Lederer had apparently been waiting for this, because he suddenly said, "Hey, Phil, for the first time in the last five hours you could go broke in one hand. Why don't we talk about making a deal?" Of course, Howard was right on. From about three tables on, I had had a huge chip lead.

At that point, feeling very vulnerable (after losing with my pocket

aces) to the possibility of finishing in third place for “only” \$55,000, I decided to make a deal. I mean, if they could beat my aces, who knows what else they could beat. (Of course, we agreed to play for a nice chunk of money for first and second places. We just made sure that no one got less than \$90,000 for third.)

Anyway, I busted Howard in short order to take the chip lead again. Then George and I battled back and forth for a couple of hours. I had him all-in once, but I needed a king or a queen to win with two cards to come. When I hit the \$110,000 mark in chips, George started “sliding in” literally every hand. I surrendered about six hands, or \$20,000 in antes and blinds, to him before I finally picked up 9s-9d and called him for my last \$90,000.

Even before the cards were flopped, George said to me, in a very nice way, “It was nice playing against you, Phil, but you can’t win this hand.” Excuse me? “George, you have Kh-8h, am I not over a 2.5-to-1 favorite to win this pot?” He replied, “Right now I just can’t lose. Can’t you feel it coming?” Sure enough, he flopped a king-high flush with 10h-Jh-Qh, and now his people began rooting for the Ah to make him a royal flush. Oh, brother.

The turn card was a ten to give me three outs (two tens and only one nine). Trust me, though, I still had some hope that I could win this pot. I still believed in math, not George’s prophecy, but the last card was another small one, and a very excited George Rodis collected his first WSOP bracelet.

Bob Lohr, Doyle Brunson, and I were out of luck. O’Neil Longson, Yosh Nakano, Ted Forrest, and Huck Seed had dodged a bullet. The answer to his earlier question is this: “Yes, George, you deserve to have a WSOP bracelet, but did it have to be in *this* event?”

TWO IRISHMEN AND HUCK

This hand comes from the final table of the 1999 World Series of Poker. There were seven players left at the final table when George McKeever opened the pot for \$70,000. The blinds were \$10,000–\$20,000, so that George opened for a standard amount

(3.5 times the big blind). Huck Seed began to think on the button with \$520,000 remaining, and then decided to call \$70,000. Noel Furlong raised \$1 million out of the small blind, and George decided to call all of his remaining chips, or about \$300,000 more. Huck threw his hand away.

The hands were then turned faceup. George had the Ac-Qc, Noel had Kd-Ks, and Huck told me he had folded 9s-9h. The flop was Jh-8d-8s, the turn 6c, and the last card brought the 2d. Noel's kings held up, with a final board of Jh-8d-8s-6c-2d, and George was out. With the final six players now secured, play ended for the day. The final six were Erik Seidel, Huck Seed, Noel Furlong, Alan Goehring, Chris Bigler, and Padraig Parkinson.

I like George's opening bet of \$70,000 with Ac-Qc, but I hate his call of Noel's raise. Why not just fold the hand? There is no way that Furlong was bluffing here. Not with all of his chips with six players left. Remember that the final six get to "try to sleep," and come back the next day to play for the big money. The best scenario that George could hope for was that Noel had a pair under queens. In which case, he would have been only a 13-to-10 underdog. If Noel has A-K, or A-A, or K-K, or Q-Q, then George is a big underdog. At least a 5-to-2 underdog, and maybe worse.

Noel had an obvious reraising situation. He raised so much that he announced the strength of his hand. I liked Noel's play here. In fact, I liked almost all of his plays the last two days. It is impressive to watch a World Champion at the top of his game. Congratulations, Noel Furlong, you are the 1999 World Champion of Poker!

Now what about the great young player Huck Seed? Huck showed me a lot of discipline and style when he just called with the pair of nines. Only a small percentage of players in the world would have just called with the two nines in Huck's position. I really like the way Huck moved his chips. If he had moved all-in with the nines, then he would have finished in sixth place. Noel would have called, and then George would have thrown Ac-Qc into the muck quickly.

I happened to be announcing the hand live on the Internet.

Huck heard me say, “It’s a good thing that George had Ac-Qc, otherwise Huck probably would have gone broke with nines on the button versus kings in the small blind.” Huck wasn’t having any of that. He said, “Phil, why are you thinking so negatively? If Noel hadn’t had the kings, then I would have busted George after the flop.”

That’s right, Huck, I like your positive attitude. In fact, I believe a positive attitude makes me feel luckier and therefore I become luckier. By the next day, I had bet \$4,000 on Huck to win it all. I felt he was the best player. I felt if he could get to a million in chips the tournament was his. (Huck did get to over \$800,000 in chips, but the hand he played for his last chips was the subject of the second hand described in this chapter. See page 36.)

BONO VERSUS THE MASTER WITH HUCK

How about that John “Bono” Bonetti in 1999 at the U.S. Poker Championships? Three firsts, a second, and a fifth, including a first in the big \$4,000 buy-in Stud and a second in the \$7,500 buy-in “Major” no-limit Hold’em event at the U.S. Open in Atlantic City. John also had Daniel Negreanu all-in in the Major, with Daniel drawing to a flush.

Oh, by the way, John was 71 years old! Someone alert the marketing department of the Poker Players Association (PPA): it’s time to recruit some new, older players down in Florida. The purely fictional PPA better start marketing John Bonetti to everyone around the country over the age of 57, since that is the age at which this late bloomer won his first poker tournament. In Tunica, Mississippi, in 2004, Bono finished seventh in the Horseshoe’s World Poker Tour event, and just missed the televised final six. Too bad.

John reminds me of Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*, who was 52 years old and living in safe comfort before he reinvented himself as a cunning leader with a warrior’s heart. John is honorable and honest, and has been my best friend since 1994. Congratulations on all your accomplishments, Bono!

This most interesting hand came up between Huck Seed, Bono, and Men “The Master” Nguyen at the 1996 World Series of Poker, at the final table. Huck had been raising every time on his button, which was Bono’s small blind and The Master’s big blind. Twice in the space of an hour, Huck had opened for \$100,000 and Bono had made it \$200,000 to go (only a \$100,000 raise). Both times Huck folded, and both times Bono showed 2-3 off suit!

At that point, Huck came charging in again for \$100,000, Bono made it \$200,000, and then Men moved all-in. Men had been able to reraise only about \$180,000 more (\$380,000 total), so John called him very reluctantly. Much to everyone’s surprise, John had Ad-Qs and Men had 9h-8h. The board brought no help for the hands, and Men was eliminated, placing about fifth.

What the heck happened here? Huck told me he was working on a steal, and this makes sense. John wanted to make the same \$100,000 raise that he had made previously, in order to disguise his hand (maybe they would put him on 2-3 again). This way, perhaps, he could lure Huck into moving all-in on him pre-flop.

It’s my guess that Men “The Master” Nguyen just made a bad read. He thought John had a hand that was so weak (like 2-3 off suit) that he couldn’t call the additional \$180,000. But even if John *was* on a steal, he may have had Men in bad shape anyway. Give Men some points for sheer daring. It takes guts to make the play he made. But I still don’t like Men’s move, because he didn’t have enough firepower to make that play. His play would have been much more powerful if he’d had more chips in front of him. If he’d had another \$100,000, he might well have made Bono lay his hand down.

Still, why risk all of your chips with 9-8 in the World Championships in this spot? Why not wait for a better hand and a better spot? I think John has to call Men’s \$180,000 raise, unless he had a really strong read on Men. Still, it goes without saying that Huck, John, and Men are three of the best poker tournament players in the world today.

PHIL'S HAND AT THE 2000 WSOP

All right, so I finally remembered how to play great in the WSOP Big One sometime during the second day of the event. The problem is that I remembered about one day too late, and finished 64th that year. At least I gave myself a chance when I ran my \$9,425 stack into about \$48,000 or so the second day. I love the World Series of Poker. I wish we had one every month!

About one hour after the dinner break, at around 10:00 P.M. the second day, the following hand came up. I had been playing very tight and solid poker all day long. From one off of the button, I opened for \$6,000 with Ac-Kc. The blinds were \$1,000–\$2,000 and the antes were \$300 apiece. The player in the small blind called me with 7-7. The flop came Q-5-2 off suit. The player in the small blind then asked me how much money I had left, and I showed him the roughly \$30,000 that I had in front of me. He then bet \$6,000.

I hated the flop. It would have been pretty easy for the small blind to have K-Q, Q-J suited, or something similar. I looked at my opponent and sensed some weakness, so I very quickly decided to raise him \$10,000 and find out if my hand was good or not. He decided to call my \$10,000 fairly quickly. Damn! I had only about \$14,000 more, and I knew he was going to call that, too. We both checked the next two cards, and he won the pot with his 7-7.

How badly did I play this hand? Well, if I really thought he was weak, then I should have raised all of my chips on the flop and not just the relatively weak \$10,000 amount that I raised. It was too easy for him to call \$10,000. He might have called \$24,000 more, but at least I would have given myself a better chance to win the pot. Of course, if I didn't sense weakness, then I could have folded my hand and continued to hang around with my last \$30,000. I don't like the fact that I acted so quickly on this hand, either. I should have given my reading powers a better chance and studied for a minute or so longer. Maybe I could have figured out that he had about 7-7 and then figured out what he would do with it if I raised. (One of the things I do well is figure out these kinds of scenarios in my mind by reading my opponent well.)

This WSOP was a bit different for me. In two full days of playing, I never had over \$50,000 in chips. What are the odds of a player playing this four-day-long event as long as I did and never having over \$50,000? To my way of thinking, I would say over 20 to 1.

JEFF SHULMAN'S BAD BEATS

In 2000, we had over 510 players at the World Series of Poker put up \$10,000 each to play in the final event. As Johnny Chan said, "I don't know about the rest of the country, but there sure were a lot of people wandering around the Horseshoe with \$10,000 in their pockets!"

The worldwide press was out in full force. It was amazing to watch the cameras going off when the WSOP's 2000 winner, Chris "Jesus" Ferguson, was posing after the event ended. (I personally was interviewed during the event by Geraldo Rivera of CNBC, E! Entertainment, the Discovery Channel, and many magazine writers as well.) I'm proud of Chris "Jesus" Ferguson and T. J. Cloutier for the way they played poker and handled themselves throughout the final two days. In my opinion, they both deserved to win the World Championship in 2000. These are just some of the reasons that I am proud of the 2000 World Series of Poker.

There were also some great surprises at that WSOP, including Jim McManus and Jeff Shulman. Jim is a novelist/poet/writer who was sent out to the WSOP to cover it for *Harper's* magazine (and eventually wrote a 16-page article on it, which turned into his best-selling book, *Positively Fifth Street*). Jim decided to play some satellites for the Big One and *whoosh*—he ended up finishing fourth in the main event. Jeff Shulman played a fantastic game of poker throughout the WSOP that year. Maybe because Jeff hadn't been there before, he was moving \$200,000 to \$1,000,000 stacks around like they were cups of water. What Jeff lacked in experience, he more than made up for with fearlessness and great reads on the rest of the field.

Here is a hand that came up between Jeff and Chris with seven

players left on poker's biggest stage (WSOP 2000). Remember, when the WSOP gets down to six players, they end play for the day and come back the next day to battle in front of the world for fame and fortune (\$1.5 million for first place). Jeff had been moving his chips around beautifully; he was raising and reraising (presumably when his opponents had nothing) almost every hand. The blinds were \$15,000–\$30,000, and the antes were \$3,000 per player, when Jeff opened for \$200,000 on the button with 7-7. Chris Ferguson decided to move all-in from the big blind with 6-6 for about \$860,000. At this point, Jeff was the chip leader with over \$1.5 million, and Chris was second with his \$860,000. After less than 20 seconds, Jeff decided to call Chris for all of his \$860,000.

Wow, Jeff would start day four with over \$2,300,000 in chips, and T. J. Cloutier would be in second place with only \$600,000. Chris would finish in seventh place. But wait a minute, they hadn't flopped the cards yet. Jeff wasn't home yet—he was, however, a 4.5-to-1 favorite to win this hand. The flop was 3h-6h-10h, giving Chris the best hand, but giving Jeff a flush draw. The next card was the 5c, which also gave Jeff a straight draw. Now Jeff needed a heart (excepting the 5h), a seven, or a four to win the pot. Chris called for (out loud), and received, a ten on the river, to make the final board 3h-6h-10h-5c-10s and give Chris the winning hand (a full house 6-6-6-10-10). Too bad for Jeff, but he kept his composure (much like I would have; yeah, right!) and still was in second chip position with roughly \$700,000.

The rest of the story is even more brutal for Jeff—as if losing this pot weren't tough enough. About one round later, Jeff picked up pocket kings in the small blind and moved all-in after T. J. opened for \$300,000 with pocket jacks. Chris picked up pocket aces in the big blind, and Jeff ended up finishing in seventh place. So he went from \$2.3 million and the chip lead going into the last day to being the next player out. Seemed like Jeff deserved better than that, but that's poker.

Anyway, back to the 7-7 versus 6-6 hand. (The aces versus kings hand was pretty natural.) I love the way Jeff played this hand. He

had been raising a lot of pots, so he opened for a huge over-raise of \$200,000 to send a message to Chris that he had something. Then when Chris moved in, Jeff correctly deduced that his pocket sevens were the best hand. As John Bonetti would say, “He had Chris by the throat.” It’s hard to be 4.5-to-1 favorite for all of the money, but Jeff put himself into this great position for the most important (and biggest pot) of his life.

How about the way Chris played the hand? I don’t like his play very much, but it’s certainly not too bad. On the one hand, I like the aggressiveness of the all-in move with the pocket sixes. Chris was trying to stop Jeff from running over the table with this move. On the other hand, Jeff did send a message with the size of his raise, and Chris was in the second chip position, so I could very easily see him fold his hand here and wait for a better spot to risk all of his chips. I probably would have folded the 6-6 in this situation, just because it was for all of his chips. Had he done so, he would still have been in great chip position. I mean, why risk all of your chips in second chip position with seven players left at the WSOP?

PHIL’S WSOP WIN NUMBER EIGHT

In the 2003 World Series of Poker’s \$2,500 buy-in limit Hold’em tournament, I found myself heads-up with Young Phan. In 2001, I was heads-up with Scotty Nguyen in Omaha Eight or Better (O 8B) with a chance to win my eighth title; I lost. In 2002, I was heads-up with Johnny Chan in no-limit Hold’em with a chance to win number eight; I lost (instead, Chan won number seven to tie me). This time I needed to win! Especially since I knew that I was at the peak of my poker powers. Unfortunately, I don’t seem to reach that peak too often, so that when I do, I need to forge ahead with guns blazing!

I was playing great poker, and I was ready to win, but Young Phan wasn’t going for it! Back and forth we battled, 100 hands, then 200 hands, then we crested 300 hands of heads-up poker, and neither of us would back down. We were playing \$3,000–\$6,000 limit when

the following hand came up; it would give me the confidence to win—and perhaps take a little steam out of Young Phan’s sails. I raised with K-10 off suit before the flop, and the flop came down 2s-4s-7h.

Young checked, and then I bet out \$3,000. Now he check-raised me, making it \$6,000 to go. I checked my hand to see if it held a spade, in case two spades came on the next two cards. I didn’t have a spade, but decided to call the \$3,000 bet anyway. The next card was the 7d, for a board of 2s-4s-7h-7d, and now Phan bet out \$6,000. I felt the right play was to fold (Phan could have me beat with any pair or ace high, or have me crushed with trip sevens), but something inside me said, “Now is the time to call, you have the best hand: Young has a straight draw or a flush draw. Phil, don’t blow this opportunity.”

Finally, I decided to trust my instincts, and called the \$6,000 bet (in my mind, I believed Young had a straight draw of some sort, like 6-8). The last card was the 9s, for 2s-4s-7h-7d-9s, and Young bet out \$6,000 again. The flush had hit! Now I could beat only a busted straight draw. But I thought that was exactly what Phan had, so I called the \$6,000 bet without too much hesitation.

When Young rapped the table, meaning that he was bluffing, I jumped out of my seat. After all, this was a supertough call, and I had made it! I heard the Internet announcer—Mark Seif—in the background saying, “Incredible. I mean what a great call Phil Hellmuth just made with king high. The flush hit, the pairs were there, in fact he couldn’t beat anything but a busted straight draw, yet he called with K-10 high!” I’m sure that Young heard that as well.

When you make a great call like that, it shows you that your instincts and reads are dead-on, and it gives you some confidence in your style of play. It can also demoralize your opponent a bit. But to Young’s credit, I didn’t see him lower the level of his play very much at all.

Later on, at the \$4,000–\$8,000 limit, I had Young down to \$22,000 and all-in with 4d-5h, up against my 4-4. It came all red, and the last card made Phan a flush. Next hand, Phan had A-4 to my 10-9, and

I flopped a flush draw, and missed; Young now had \$88,000 again! The third hand, however, proved to be a monster.

Young made it \$16,000 to go with what he later said was A-8, and I made it \$24,000 to go with A-Q. I bet the flop of 10-8-4, and Young called. A queen hit on the turn, and I decided that Young would bet if I checked here. I checked, and Young came out firing, with \$16,000, and I check-raised, making it \$32,000 to go. I noticed that he had only \$24,000 left, so I announced, "I bet \$16,000 in the dark." The river was an ace, for a board of 10-8-4-Q-A, and now Phan called me quickly. (By the way, if he had A-8, then his not raising here turned out to be a great move!) I flipped my hand faceup and collected the pot!!

It was all over the next hand when Young and I were all-in in the dark, his 6-2 to my 6-4, and a turn four gave me my eighth WSOP Championship. It would have tied me for the all-time record, but Doyle Brunson had won number nine one week earlier. Oh well, at least I gave myself some breathing room against Johnny Chan, at least for three days, until he won number eight to tie me. A few days later Chan won number nine to pass me! A week after that I won number nine! Finally, after all these years, I had caught Doyle. Chan, Doyle, and I are all knotted up at nine WSOP wins after the 2003 WSOP.

But I'm not rooting against anyone else in poker. Doyle's winning number nine, at age 70, is terrific; go, Doyle go! And Chan's winning numbers eight and nine, Ferguson's winning numbers four and five, and Seidel's winning number six is great theater and drama for poker and the WSOP! Boys, I'll race y'all to 24!

TYING THE RECORD AT THE WSOP

In the \$3,000 buy-in no-limit Hold'em tournament at the World Series of Poker in 2003, I managed to win my ninth title and bracelet, thereby tying me with Doyle Brunson and Johnny Chan for the all-time lead. I won \$410,000, a WSOP Championship, and the all-time lead, oh happy day! I'm still feeling very blessed and happy.



Phil winning his ninth bracelet at the 2003 WSOP.

The sailing was almost as smooth as it had ever been for me, except for when Erik Seidel started running me over like I was a Hyundai and he a Hummer. I would open for \$8,000–\$15,000, and he would raise me \$30,000–\$50,000 more. Time and time again this happened, so I finally decided to make a stand with A-J for his \$50,000 raise.

But then, as I was about to move all-in, I thought better of it. I thought, “I know he has it this time, and if I move all-in he’s going to show me Q-Q. Patience, Phil, patience. I know I’m down to \$120,000 from over \$400,000, but the blinds are only \$2,500–\$5,000.” I kept thinking, “Don’t panic, and you’ll still have a chance to win.”

Then Nolan Dalla asked the crowd who they were rooting for. In all of my life, the crowd has never been behind me before, so I automatically thought, “At least my wife, my mom, and my sister will clap for me!” Amazingly, the crowd cheered for me the loudest, and I thought, “I can win this thing.” It was a powerful thought to have, and it felt so right.

But let’s back up a bit. When we were seven-handed, Erik had limped in with J-J, which prompted me to limp in with 8-5 off suit behind him and brought disastrous consequences for me! With a flop of Q-J-8, everyone checked and I bet out \$8,000, and Erik just called me—which was a beautiful “just call.” Now an eight came off, and Erik bet out \$15,000. I studied him and decided that I couldn’t raise it with my three eights, so I just called. On the end, Erik sensed that I was powerful, and bet out a whopping \$60,000. What a great bet he made here! I called and lost; and then I thought to myself, Erik sure played that hand great, but I did it to myself by coming after him with 8-5 off suit.

Now Erik limped in with K-10 on the button, and I called \$2,500 more to complete the blinds with Q-6. The flop came down K-Q-6. I checked, and Erik bet out \$12,000. I announced, “All-in,” and counted out a \$99,000 raise. This was the first time I was all-in since 3:00 P.M. on day one—it was now 11:00 P.M. on day two. Now Erik studied a long time, and I had a bad feeling that if he called, I was

going to lose. I felt he would outdraw me, but there I sat, telling myself, “Look, you don’t have to get unlucky here. Just let things play out, and maybe you’ll win the pot.” (All the while I was thinking, “Please, Hold’em!”)

Erik reluctantly called—I believe he knew that I had him beat—and the next card was a nine. Close! Now the board read K-Q-6-9, which gave him a straight draw (a jack) as well. The final card, a three, gave me the pot, as well as a good shot at winning the tournament. At this point, we were still three-handed—me, Erik, and Daniel Negreanu. I had been waiting a long time to win a pot, and I could see both Daniel’s and Erik’s demeanors change a bit. I won the next pot, and Erik said, “I’ve created a monster.” Hearing that from Erik gave me nothing but more confidence.

Erik still had almost \$700,000 in chips, but I began to feel that this tournament could be mine. Erik kept running me over, but I knew he would try to run me over when I had the nuts, soon enough. I just remained patient, and never raised a pot before the flop, so that he couldn’t win much when he did raise me. I was just calling on the button, and taking a flop with K-Q suited or whatever—unless Erik raised it, in which case I would just fold again, or call if my hand was strong enough.

Meanwhile, Daniel Negreanu was doing the same with his strong hands. We both were just calling before the flop, or taking a flop, or perhaps calling Erik’s smaller raise before the flop. If Erik was going to run us over, he wasn’t going to win much doing so.

Finally, I picked up Q-Q on the button. For some reason, I actually raised before the flop. Erik called my raise, and the flop was 9-10-Q. Erik checked, and then I bet out about \$20,000 or so. Erik called again, and the turn was the fourth queen, for a board of 9c-10d-Qs-Qc. Erik checked, and then I bet out \$30,000 with my four queens—looking for a raise from Seidel.

When I put my chips into the pot, I bet them with my favorite “bluffing tell.” I tried to make Erik think I was bluffing with my hand motions, my facial expressions, the way I put in the chips, and the way I stacked the chips before I bet. Erik may have had a made

straight (K-J), a pair of jacks, or, most likely, I think, a draw of some sort. The Qc made a flush draw possible, as well as a straight draw.

In any case, Seidel announced, "I raise it." He proceeded to call the \$30,000 and to raise \$75,000. I immediately thought my best move here would be to move all-in, but as I counted out \$75,000, and my remaining \$83,000 or so, I decided that Erik might have nothing. If he had a draw or a made hand (like a straight or J-J), he certainly would call my last \$83,000; but if he had a bluff, then he would fold for my last \$83,000.

Finally, I decided that just calling the \$75,000 raise was my best move, but I'm still not sure that that was the right play. In any case, a ten on the river (9-10-Q-Q-10) made Erik check, and then I decided to bet \$40,000. After a long delay, Erik called me, and I had the pleasure of saying, "Four queens." As the hand was announced to the whole room at the WSOP, a big "Ohhh" was heard. Still, I knew I had a lot of work left to do, and I didn't even smile.

One round later, Erik raised my big blind from the small blind, and I called with K-J. The flop came down K-10-9, and Erik bet out \$40,000. I called immediately, without even knowing how much he bet. On fourth street, a two came off, and Erik bet a large pile of \$5,000 chips (\$95,000, it turned out), and again, within one second of his bet, I said, "Call." The last card was a six, and Erik checked. I felt almost certain that I had the best hand, but I checked behind him with the feeling that I had won enough with one pair of kings with a jack kicker!

When Erik paused on the end, I said, "King-jack," and he replied, "I believe that's good." Now I had the chip lead again! Finally, I started to raise a few more hands, and soon Erik was down to \$65,000. Daniel remained at about \$250,000, while I held about \$900,000 or so.

When Erik moved all-in for about \$65,000 with 9-9 on the button, I called him with A-6 from the \$4,000 small blind. A lucky A-K-J flop gave me the pot, and now I was looking at a one-on-one match with Daniel Negreanu. The first hand of heads-up, Daniel made it \$25,000 to go. I looked down at A-K, and moved him all-in.

He said, “So that’s the way it’s going to be, huh?” Then he folded, but I didn’t want him to see my A-K (he knows now, though, after reading this!), so I laid it facedown.

About three hands later, I limped in with 3-4 off suit (or so I thought at the time), and the flop came down 2h-8h-Qs. Daniel checked, and then I looked more closely at my hand, which proved to be the 3h-4h for a flush draw. In my mind, I was thinking that this was the same situation in which Mark Seif had finished ninth—a small heart draw against Daniel’s top pair. So I checked very quickly behind Daniel.

The turn card brought down the 5h, for 2h-8h-Qs-5h, and Daniel checked again. Now I decided that a big bet relative to the size of the pot would be a good idea with my flush. I thought it might look like Qs-Kh, or something similar, with a heart draw. So I bet out \$30,000 into the \$20,000 pot. Daniel started reaching deep (really deep) into his stack, calling the \$30,000 and raising \$100,000 more. Immediately, I asked how much more he had, and he replied that he had \$117,000.

I thought to myself that he had to have a big hand here, but what could I do? I counted out \$217,000 and studied for a minute. I was thinking, “If he has a flush, then I’m dead to the Ah or 6h here (for a straight flush); but he could have many hands in this situation that I could beat.” Finally, I decided that I had to go with this hand, and I put \$217,000 into the pot. Daniel then said, “I think I’m dead, but I’m calling you.” I said, “I don’t know about that, but I have a flush.” To my enormous relief he said, “That’s good so far,” and flipped Q-8, for top two pair.

Please, no queen or eight on the last card and it’s over! The river was a seven, which looked awfully close, but I had done it. I had won my ninth WSOP bracelet, and this one was going to go to my brother, Dave Hellmuth, in Minneapolis (his law firm there is called Hellmuth and Johnson)! This one had tested my patience to the limit—or, rather, Erik Seidel had tested my patience to the limit. I believe that if the blinds had been raised faster, then Erik would have won it. But I’m proud of myself for hanging in there and winning number nine.

DID I DESERVE BETTER?

Here comes an account that I have been dreading writing. I'm going to tell you exactly how I went out in the "Big One" in 2003.

First off, after winning two Hold'em bracelets at the 2003 WSOP, I liked my chances in the "Big One." You see, I don't always play great poker, and sometimes I don't even feel like a great poker player, but occasionally I play spectacular poker for a month or two. And the WSOP in 2003 was my time to play spectacular poker!

As the first three days ended, I found myself with \$362,000 in chips. I had never been even close to all-in, much less ever been called all-in. If I had K-K or Q-Q against an equal stack, then I chose to play a small pot. If I flopped a set, then I chose to play a small pot. In the first three days, the biggest bet I made or called was only \$40,000.

Therefore, I felt I had about a 20 percent chance to win the whole thing with 45 players left. But I was dismayed to find out that Sam Farha was to my right at the beginning of day four, not because I fear him (although I believe he is the best pot-limit Omaha player in the world), but because he is very very reckless in no-limit Hold'em (by the way, I love Sam!). Although I expected Farha to do more damage to himself than to the other great players, I did witness him take out Tony Dee on day four, even though Farha played Q-J off suit very poorly.

Tony had raised it in middle position with Q-10, and Sam had called with Q-J off suit (I hate his call here before the flop). After a flop of Qh-10h-3d, Tony bet out big, and Sam called (his call here was OK). On fourth street, the 6s came off, and now Tony bet out \$40,000, and Sam called (by then, even the spectators in the hand knew Tony had Q-J beat). At this point, Sam could not beat any hand at all, and he had to know that Tony was going to bet his last \$50,000 on the river if he had Q-J beat. I believe this added up to an easy fold for Sam. But a jack did hit on the river, and Tony bet his last \$50,000, and Sam called and won.

This was a pretty brutal way for Tony to go out! Sam would have had only about \$170,000 left if he hadn't hit the jack on the river

against Tony (assuming he called the \$50,000 river bet). In any case, I thought, “Whoa, I don’t like the way Sam played that hand at all. He will come after me weak soon, and maybe give me a bunch of chips.”

With 37 players left, I now had \$430,000 in chips when the following hand came up. Sam opened for \$12,000, and I looked down at K-Q. I studied him for a moment, and felt strongly that I had him beat. Therefore, I called the \$12,000, and raised it \$35,000 more. Sam beat me into the pot with Qd-Jd. Now this is a very bad hand to call a raise with anytime in any no-limit Hold’em tournament, period (especially for \$35,000 more), so when he called quickly, I reevaluated his hand strength in my mind.

With a flop of Kd-9s-3d, Sam checked, and I checked. Fourth street brought the 2d, and now Sam bet out \$50,000 with his flush (he made a good bet here). I called quickly because I was looking for him to bluff after I checked the flop to him. When the 2s hit the river, Sam bet out \$80,000 (another very good bet on his part), and I studied him and called. I went a little ballistic when he showed me Qd-Jd, because all champions and semi-champions know you don’t call off your money with Q-J in a no-limit Hold’em tourney. If he had showed me A-K, a set, or A-A, then I wouldn’t have been nearly as upset. Still, he did beat me!

About 20 hands later, Sam played the Q-J again to my Kd-Qd, but I won back only \$35,000 when I flopped him dead (K-Q-4). So I was hanging there at around \$280,000 or so for the next couple hours. When we hit 27 players, I felt a lot better. I was thinking, “I’ll still have a million at the end of the day without too much difficulty.”

With the blinds at \$3,000–\$6,000, Sam opened for \$20,000, and Jason Lester quickly moved all-in for \$167,000 (Jason said, “I’m all-in again”). In the big blind, I looked down at Q-Q. I began first to study Jason, and I kept thinking that he bet way too fast for A-A or K-K. I kept thinking that he had 10-10 or J-J, and I couldn’t get J-J out of my mind. I had watched Jason play K-K twice earlier in the day, and it certainly wasn’t that hand again, to judge from everything that I saw and felt.

I just kept thinking he had J-J, and my reads all month had been spot-on. Obviously, Jason knew I had a huge hand as I studied him, and I smelled some serious weakness there as well. OK, it all adds up to Jason having J-J; now, what about Sam? I studied Sam for a while, but he just looked disgusted, and ready to fold his hand. Finally, I said, "I call." To my relief, Sam quickly folded. Then I said, "Jason, I just have queens." I should have said, "I believe you have jacks," just to show the world why I made this big call here.

If I had thought he had A-K, then I would have folded for sure. The flop came down Ks-8s-2s, and I looked over to see the suits we had. Did either of us have a spade? Nope, he had clubs and hearts, and so did I. I thought, "Please don't let it come spade, spade for a split." The next card was the 6d, and now I thought, "Just let me dodge one more card." Alas, the last card was a jack!

I very calmly said, "Nice hand." Inside, I still felt blessed, but I knew that I would have had over \$430,000 in chips, and the chip lead at my table. Still, it was OK; I still had almost \$100,000 left, which was enough for me to last . . . one more hand!

The very next hand, in the small blind, I picked up A-K, and the man two off of the button opened for \$20,000. I quickly announced, "I'm all-in" for the first time in four days. I got called by his 10-10, and the board brought 3-6-J-J-J. I had played four amazing days of poker, and *bang, bang*, I was gone.

In my mind, I had known that I was going to win the 2003 WSOP, and so had my parents, but inconceivably, I was out! Still, I was calm, and I still felt blessed as I said, "Nice hand," and got up and left. No tantrums, no whining (for once!); I left the WSOP acting like a man who is blessed.

Yes, I felt as if I deserved better, but I can't complain to the powers that be about this with everything else that is going my way. After all, I didn't even have to take the 4.5-to-1 favorite. In 2003, I could have folded my Q-Q, even knowing that Jason had J-J. In 2002, after playing no big pots for three days, I could have folded my A-K suited versus Varkonyi's Q-10 for a \$220,000 pot. And in

2001, after playing no big pots for five days, I could have folded my 9-9 versus Phil Gordon's 6-6 for a \$1.2 million pot.

There is no law that says you have to play a big pot, even if you have a strong feeling (if you "know") that your opponent is weak.

The last thing is this: I feel that if people keep on deserving better, then eventually they will get it! Look out at the Big One next year, for Phil Hellmuth Jr. will be sitting at the final table, and 1,000 other entrants won't.

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World Poker Tour

The World Poker Tour has sparked a huge surge of interest in poker, a revolution that has catapulted Texas Hold'em into people's living rooms.

Steve Lipscomb, WPT's president, had a vision. He saw that he could bring that same technology over from the U.K.'s Late Night Poker Show and create a huge poker tour that would encompass several of the existing poker tournaments in the United States—like the Los Angeles Poker Classic, the World Poker Finals, and the World Poker Open. Throw in a few new ones, like UtimateBet.com's Poker Classic in Aruba, and Bellagio's Five-Star World Poker Classic \$10,000 buy-in no-limit Hold'em event. Then cap it all off with Bellagio's \$25,000 buy-in WPT championships, and, presto! You have the World Poker Tour! (Now showing on the Travel Channel.)

Every good idea needs some money to make it happen, and here's

where we credit Lyle Berman for having the foresight to invest \$3 million in an idea that had been laughed out of many studio executives' houses in 2001. (By the way, Lyle is also one of a couple of dozen or so members of the Poker Hall of Fame.)

The WPT has created new stars, like Gus Hansen (who has now won a whopping three WPT events) and Howard Lederer "the Professor" (two WPT wins), and has shown the world that anyone can play, and win, a Hold'em tournament. More important, the WPT showed a grateful audience that Hold'em is an easy game to play. Here, then, are some key hands that came up during the WPT's first two years.

KASSEM "FREDDY" DEEB'S LAYDOWN

In May 2002, the diversity of poker surfaced big-time at the final table of the first ever World Poker Tour event: the Bellagio's \$10,000 buy-in no-limit Hold'em tournament. In the spirit of soccer's World Cup, here's a quick summation of the action. First Vietnam (Scotty Nguyen) was eliminated by Denmark (Gus Hansen). Then Switzerland (Chris Bigler) was eliminated by Denmark. Then the United States (John "World" Hennigan) was eliminated by Indonesia (John Juanda). Then Denmark took out Lebanon (Freddy Deeb) with the "magic" Q-10 against Lebanon's A-K (the 2002 World Series of Poker had just ended, and Q-10 became famous for its pivotal role in Robert Varkonyi's win there). Finally, Denmark won the tournament (and the \$560,000 first prize) when his K-K held up against Indonesia's A-J. Congratulations to Gus Hansen for winning the first World Poker Tour event!

Somewhere along the way, with the blinds at \$5,000–\$10,000 and the antes at \$2,000, the following hand came up between Freddy Deeb and John Hennigan. World had just finished raising or reraising eight out of ten hands (I mentioned in my TV comments that "John is speeding down a highway going ninety miles an hour, and he will win the tournament if he doesn't get a speeding ticket")

when he opened for \$35,000 under the gun. Freddy now raised it \$100,000 more with 10-10, and when the action got back to John he immediately announced, “I’m all-in.” Freddy had only another \$130,000 left at the time, so he called the \$130,000 raise, getting laid 3.2 to 1, right? No. Freddy read John as having an overpair, and that he, Freddy, was a 4.5-to-1 underdog, so he folded his hand.

What?! You don’t like his fold here? Me neither, unless John has an overpair to Freddy’s 10-10. John may have A-K, A-Q, or A-J (unlikely), or 9-9, 8-8, or possibly another lower pair. And the fact that John was playing so fast made it more likely that he would reraise Freddy with a hand that Freddy could beat. In other words, John had a loose and fast “table image,” and was expecting someone to reraise him soon.

When John later confirmed that he did, indeed, have an overpair to Freddy’s 10-10, I was pretty impressed! It’s not easy to fold 10-10 when you have one-half of your money in the pot, and the antes and blinds are so big. Freddy’s great laydown allowed him to move up from fifth place to third place, and pick up an additional \$60,000. It also kept him in the game and gave him a chance, for the moment, to win the tournament and the \$560,000 first-place prize. In fact, Freddy did come back from that \$130,000 to over \$500,000 in chips, and he eventually challenged Gus Hansen and John Juanda for the title. This all because he made a world-class fold with his 10-10.

NOR’EASTERS BLOWING THROUGH

In late 2002, two World Poker Tour (WPT) events in one week—one in San Francisco and the other in Connecticut—guaranteed that many of the top poker players in the world would be doing a lot of flying. In addition to the big prize pools that are being offered by the WPT these days, the final six players all get to make the TV cut. With more than a few oversize egos out there in the poker world (yes, I’m one of them), especially among the top players, making the TV table is an important factor these days!

In the first event, at Lucky Chances Casino in Colma, California, south of San Francisco, I made the final six with \$433,000 in chips and very high expectations for the next day. We had begun play Sunday at 12:30 P.M., and stopped when we hit the final six at 4:30 A.M. (more on long days below). Connecticut native Paul Darden (a tough, up-and-coming young black player) was one of those who made the final table. After a very disappointing fourth-place finish for me, and \$34,000 in prize money, I watched Paul play some beautiful poker and take down the \$160,000 first prize, which included a \$25,000 buy-in seat at the April 2003 WPT finals. This was the first strike of the week for Paul, the nor'easter.

The Lucky Chances tourney ended Monday, and all of the champion players (and the WPT staff, cameramen, and commentators) were on a plane for Foxwoods Casino in Connecticut by Tuesday for the Thursday \$10,000 buy-in event. We arrived to a nor'easter storm on the East Coast that was quite a shock to a California guy like me! The cold, hard winds and rain. . . . Anyway, 90 players put up \$10,200 each to play, and first place would be \$360,000 this time around. I was happy to make day two, along with 44 other players, with average chips of \$18,800, but that was as far as I would go. I picked up pocket queens against Tony Ma's pocket kings.

The action began on day two at 4:00 P.M., and didn't end until we had the final six players at 6:30 A.M. the next day. Yes, poker can be an endurance sport/test, and it helps to be in good physical condition for these long, pressure-filled plays. Out of intellectual curiosity or, in other words, just to see how the other top players were playing, I hung out and watched the whole darn thing.

As I studied them all night long, it became apparent that two players were distinguishing themselves from the field (again). Both Layne Flack and Phil Ivey were already having great years in 2002, but none better than Phil. Phil Ivey won three World Series of Poker (WSOP) tournaments in 2002, an accomplishment that has been equaled only two other times in poker history. But Layne Flack was right on Phil's heels as far as accomplishments in 2002

were concerned; you see, Layne won two WSOP tournaments as well. And Layne won more money with his two WSOP wins, which were both in no-limit Hold'em.

What a showdown it was going to be! Layne coming back to day three with \$270,000, and Phil coming back with the chip lead of \$280,000—what a matchup we were going to have between two of the hottest poker players in the world that year. It would be the “Layne and Phil show,” and the remaining players would be “the rest of the story.”

Layne is very unpredictable, and a genius at no-limit Hold'em. Phil Ivey is another talented young man, also a nor'easter. Much like Paul Darden; do you see where I'm going with this? Phil has been called the “Tiger Woods of poker” because he looks a lot like Tiger, and he has won four WSOP events already.

But wait a minute, there was another nor'easter named Howard Lederer at the final table, with \$93,000. Although currently living in Las Vegas, Howard grew up on the East Coast and had lived in New York for many years. With seven players left, the following hand came up between Layne Flack and Howard Lederer. Layne opened for \$6,000 in the first position, and after a moment of studying Layne, Howard announced, “I'm all-in for \$26,000.” Layne said, “I call,” and flipped up his two hole cards, 8-8. Howard then flipped up his K-J, and the flop came down 8-J-Q.

Howard put his jacket on and stood up to leave, because Layne had flopped trips, and Howard would need two perfect cards in a row to win the pot. Howard later told me, “In my mind, I was already at the airport in Providence leaving for home.” But wait a minute, Howard. The next card off was a jack, and Howard had hit trip jacks. Layne, however, still had the best hand, with a full house, eights full of jacks. Howard would now need a jack, a queen, or a king. The last card was a miracle king for Howard, making his jacks full of kings beat Layne's eights full of jacks. Howard had hit the perfect-perfect at exactly the right time! As Howard later told me, “It was just a very exciting pot where I was only a 12-to-10 underdog when the money went in.” Yep, Howard, you were 12-to-10

underdog when the money went in, but you were a 20-to-1 dog after the flop!

After Howard survived the all-in, another player, not Howard, was eliminated to end the day. This was one of the best no-limit Hold'em players in the world today, woman or man: Kathy Liebert. Layne called her all-in bet with his Qh-10h to her K-K, and made a flush (ouch). (By the way, the WPT would have loved to have another woman player in the final six.)

The Phil versus Layne matchup never materialized, as a lot of us thought it might (Ivey finished fourth). Instead, Howard ran his \$93,000 up and up, until a Layne versus Howard matchup did. By the way, Howard did win a WSOP tournament in 2002, and had the experience (he's been playing high-stakes poker for 15 years) to face down Layne and win the title. Two big WPT tourneys in one week and two nor'easter winners: congratulations to Paul Darden and Howard Lederer.

THE AMAZING LAYNE FLACK

Layne Flack is a no-limit Hold'em genius. He looks at the game a bit differently than the rest of us, but his way of playing works fine. You say he's too erratic? Yes, he's a bit too erratic sometimes (in my opinion), but so what? We all wish we had the creative streak to be that erratic, even if only sometimes. Here is a guy who won two World Series of Poker tournaments in 2002, both in no-limit Hold'em. Incredibly, in 2003, he won two more WSOP events, although neither was in no-limit Hold'em.

Mr. Flack finished second in the Foxwoods' World Poker Tour (WPT) \$10,000 buy-in no-limit Hold'em tournament in November 2002. And he has reached at least three other WSOP final tables in pot-limit or no-limit Hold'em. Did I mention that he spots the field by drinking a couple of six-packs of beer while he plays? Which begs the question, does "Drunk Layne" play better no-limit Hold'em than "Sober Layne"? Let's put it this way: I am scared of no one at no-limit Hold'em, but I have a healthy respect for "Drunk Layne"! When



Layne Flack won two events at the 2003 WSOP.

Layne is drinking in this game (it hurts his other games, like limit Hold'em, Stud, Omaha 8/b, etc.), he is dead-on with his reads, and has no fear whatsoever. If he smells weakness, then *bam*, he moves all-in on you, and you fold, shaking your head. It's hard to beat a guy who has great reads and no fear.

Here is a hand that came up at the final table at Foxwoods in 2002. The hand shows something: greatness, recklessness, or both? With the blinds at \$800–\$1,600, and the antes at \$300 a man, Layne limped in with Jd-7d. Andy Bloch limped in with K-Q, and then Jay Colombo raised it \$3,400 more in the big blind with Q-Q. Layne called, and Andy called. (Sometimes I take a suited-connector “flyer” like this myself, Daniel Negreanu style.) So, the flop came down 10-9-5 rainbow, and Jay bet only \$7,000 on the flop. Now Layne called, and Andy folded—strange that Layne would call with only the second-best-possible belly buster (inside-straight draw), and that Andy would fold with a better belly buster and two over-cards.

Anyway, the next card off was a queen, and now Jay bet only \$12,000 (obviously, he didn't want to lose Layne in case Layne was drawing dead). With over \$30,000 in the pot, a now open-ended straight draw, and, I'm sure, a plan to bluff in case he missed his draw, Layne called. The last card off was a king, and now Jay bet his last \$37,000, and Layne called with his now-made straight (the board was now 10-9-5-Q-K).

I can understand Layne's \$3,400 call before the flop, because the raise was so small. His \$7,000 call after the flop was a lot harder to figure, but he was probably thinking he could bluff Jay out if he didn't hit his hand. On fourth street, he had to call the \$12,000 bet.

As for how Jay played the hand, hmm, I don't like the small raise before the flop too much, but it's OK. Jay has to be thinking that he's pricing in a very dangerous player when he raises only \$3,400 more. I would have to have bet more on the flop, or just checked my hand. Think of this scenario: Jay checks, Layne checks, and now Andy checks or bets. Either way, Jay gets Andy hooked in there for something. (Either Jay check-raises Layne or

Andy on the flop and wins it, or Andy hits top pair on fourth street and gets hooked into the pot.) On fourth street, I would have had to bet the size of the pot or all of my chips, or check. If Jay checks, then he can check-raise Layne out of the hand, or get Layne to bet all of his chips when he's in bad shape. If they both check, then Jay doesn't have to lose all of his chips on the end when the straight hits.

But I really hate Jay's bet of \$37,000 on the end here. I just don't think Layne would call him with anything but a straight at this point in the hand. I think Jay should have checked on the end, or bet just a little bit. (By the way, I'm not saying that Jay should have folded when Layne bet all-in, or raised all-in on the end. Jay may well have had to go broke on this hand anyway, but he did not need to by betting all-in.)

You just don't see too many hands like this come up, especially not at a final table of a WPT event. Playing the Jd-7d before the flop and on the flop like this is a very risky play, and it takes a great champion like Layne—and a lot of luck—to make it pay off big. Make no mistake though, Layne played the hand for two reasons: first, to hit it and win big; and second, he was bluffing big if he had to!

GUS — THREE-TIME CHAMPION

My hat is off to Gus Hansen! Gus has won an unbelievable three World Poker Tour events, and has a third-place finish as well. Considering there were only 22 WPT events total, this result is nothing short of phenomenal. On a cruise in January 2004, Gus won his third WPT event.

In the late stages of this tournament, with the blinds at \$1,000–\$2,000 and a \$500-a-man ante, the tournament was down to two tables; playing seven-handed at both tables, a tight French player named Eli raised in early position, making it \$7,000 to go. Gus said, “Everyone folded to the small blind, where I suddenly woke up with two aces. I had about \$120,000, Eli had about \$140,000, and

let's not forget about Mike Augustine in the big blind with \$83,000. It's not every day that you wake up with two aces, and thus I was trying to extract the most money that I could with this hand."

Gus goes on, "Having played with Augustine the last couple of days, I was aware that with any decent holdings, he was capable of coming over the top. So I decided to smooth-call." Which works well for Gus anyway, because he does like to call a lot of raises before the flop, and people think he is weak all the time. "Unfortunately, Mike decided to just call the \$7,000 bet," said Gus.

The flop came down K-7-3, all off suit. Gus continued, "As I started out playing this hand a little bit backward, I decided to continue the trend and bet. I bet out a small but not insignificant bet of \$15,000 into the \$25,000 pot. Almost before the chips left my hand, Augustine raised it up to \$45,000 to go. I actually started to get a little scared when I realized that Eli was considering calling, or raising the \$45,000 bet. I decided that if Eli called the bet, then I was beat; but if he moved all-in, then I was going to have to go with the hand. I felt like if he had a set he would just call, but with A-K or K-Q he would move all-in.

"But after a minute of contemplating, Eli folded the hand, leaving me heads-up with Mike. I didn't feel like I had any special read on his holding, but as in a lot of tournament situations, it always make me feel comfortable knowing that I have my opponent covered. Also, I felt like if he had three sevens or three threes, then he probably wouldn't have raised me here on the flop. So I decided to go with it, and reraise him all-in.

"I was one hundred percent sure I would get called, and see the next two cards. And here's a little thing worth pointing out: in the late stages of a tournament, people in general just want to last, and the strength of the all-in bet is magnified. With \$38,000 left for Mike, he could scrounge around and try to move up, but to me perhaps the best move with a holding of, say, 7-8 or K-Q would be to make a stand because of the pot odds. Then he will have either \$174,000 or be out. My point here is that the all-in raise makes my

opponents fold a lot of hands in situations where they should be trying to win the tournament instead of moving from fourteenth to thirteenth. To my surprise, and my liking, he folded his hand. I was happy to have him fold his five-outer, and put the chips safely into my stack.”

Gus Hansen has taken the poker world by storm these last two years, and he was recently inducted into the Commerce Casino’s Walk of Fame. Gus is a charter member no less, along with Doyle Brunson and James Garner (of *Maverick* fame). Continued good luck and good health to you, Gus!

PHIL IVEY’S A-Q AT THE WPT CHAMPIONSHIPS

In the first WPT (World Poker Tour) \$25,000 buy-in Tour Championship in April 2003, Phil Ivey was just cruising along for the first four days. In fact, within the first hour, he had run his \$25,000 starting stack up to \$80,000 in chips. When Ivey hit the final table, he won a key hand against Alan Goehring, with his Q-Q against Alan’s A-K. That was the only pot that Phil really needed to win up until that point in the tournament. Early on day four, Phil reached the final six, and they broke for the day; the final six would appear on the World Poker Tour’s show on the Travel Channel.

After Doyle Brunson and Ted Forrest were suddenly eliminated by Alan in the same spectacular hand, Phil found himself among the final three players. First place was to be \$1 million, second place was \$500,000, and third place was \$250,000. Not too long afterward, the following hand came up. With the antes at \$3,000 a man, and the blinds at \$15,000-\$30,000, Kirill Gerasimov opened the pot on the button for \$100,000. Alan then called the \$100,000 bet. As it turned out, Alan’s call sealed Phil’s fate, because Phil had A-Q.

You see, when Alan called, Ivey felt very strongly that Alan was weak, and that he couldn’t call a \$750,000 reraise. It turns out that he was right, because Alan had a 6-3 off suit (more on that later). So by



Phil Ivey with a ton of chips in front of him at the \$25,000 buy-in WPT Championship Event in 2003.

moving in here, Phil reasoned, he would win \$250,000 without even having to show down his hand! His plan was to have Kirill and Alan fold their hands, and then he would collect Kirill's \$100,000 bet, Alan's \$100,000 bet, and the \$30,000 in front of him plus the antes. Again, Phil says he felt sure that Alan was weak; he also knew that Kirill couldn't call the raise with very many hands. Kirill had to have a big hand for Phil's plan to fail.

Phil had \$850,000 in chips in front of him, Alan had about \$3.2 million, and Kirill had \$1 million. Phil said that he didn't really have a read on Kirill during this hand, and it was very likely that A-Q was the better hand here, so he moved all-in. Moving all-in seemed much better to Phil than raising the pot \$300,000 or so, because he would have to call the reraise anyway. Why not commit himself? Then perhaps Kirill would lay down 7-7, 8-8, or 9-9. Whereas if Phil raised \$300,000 or so, Kirill might well have moved all-in on Phil, and forced Phil to call. Unfortunately for Phil, Kirill had A-K, and called Phil quickly.

Phil said, "If I'd had more chips, then I may have raised \$300,000 or so, or perhaps merely called Kirill's raise. Then perhaps I would have been able to fold when Kirill reraised me before the flop, or when I missed the flop. If I'd had *fewer* chips, then I would have moved all-in more quickly than I did. In regard to Kirill: he is a very talented player, and he may be around for a long time. Alan is very difficult to play against, because he puts a ton of pressure on you, raising and reraising all the time; and he has no fear. Someone like that is a handful at times."

The rest of the story is this: the flop came down K-6-3. As it turned out, Phil lost the pot and was eliminated from the Tour Championship. But the story doesn't end there, because Alan *would have* flopped two pair, which would have busted Kirill (Kirill hit his A-K on the flop). Until the hole cards became exposed in 2003, a player couldn't gaze that far into the future!

Phil says, "Now I know that if I had just called Kirill's raise, Kirill would have been eliminated, and I would have won an additional

\$250,000 [at least \$500,000, or perhaps \$1 million], and played Alan heads-up for the title. Oh well, that's poker for you."

Phil Ivey is a very talented young player, one we will hear about for years to come. I have played with him a lot, and he has handled himself with both class and dignity. You cannot help yourself, you have to root for the guy. Even if he may eventually break all of my World Series of Poker records, I say, "Good luck, Phil Ivey!"

TRYING TO WIN THE BIKE

While playing in the Bicycle Club's \$5,000 buy-in World Poker Tour no-limit Hold'em tournament in 2003, the following hand came up on day two. The event was scheduled over three days, but the structure was way too fast, and 309 players were reduced to a mere 54 players in day one's eight hours of play. I think we really need all WPT events to be structured so as to allow the players to employ the maximum amount of skill possible over three days. The World Series of Poker is on the right track in 2004, going to six days of play.

In any case, I made it back to day two of the Bike's event with \$18,600, with the blinds at \$500–\$1,000 and an ante of \$200 a player. My ideal was to double up, and then see if my opponents could beat me or not. About the 10th hand or so, I was dealt the Ad-Qd in the small blind. A player two off of the button made it \$3,500 to go, and I studied for a minute.

I was thinking: number one, I hate A-Q, and this hand has cost me more money than any other in no-limit Hold'em tournaments; number two, I probably can't fold this hand; and number three, do I then move all-in or just call? The thought of going broke with A-Q again wasn't very appealing to me, so I decided to just call the bet. The flop then came down As-9h-6h, and I checked. At this point, I was probably check-raising the flop all-in.

My opponent then checked behind me, and the Qc came off the deck for As-9h-6h-Qc. Now I decided that checking here would be a bad play, because I didn't want my opponent to hit some sort

of trips or straight card for free, especially since I was now committed to my hand for all of my chips with the top two pair. I was also thinking that betting too much here would be a mistake, because I wanted action with my now very powerful hand.

So I bet out a small \$2,000 into this \$9,000 pot, and my opponent moved all-in! “Yikes,” I thought, “did I run into a set here or what?” After a quick 10-second study I realized that I could beat a ton of hands, and that I couldn’t fold the top two pair here in this situation; thus, I called. I was pleasantly surprised, and a bit shocked, to find that my opponent had Q-J, and that he was drawing dead—no matter what card hit on the last card, I would win this pot.

OK, now that I was doubled up in chips, it was time to find out if my opponents could beat me! I decided to play the waiting game, since I suspected that Stan Goldstein—who was on my left—might reraise me if I began to raise a lot of pots. But the blinds and antes kept relentlessly creeping up, and I found myself anteing off quite a few chips. I did make one move where, in fact, Stan did reraise me, and I was forced to fold—grrr! Stan had nice timing that time, but I will get him soon!

With the blinds now at \$1,000–\$2,000, I finally raised with Jd-10d, making it \$4,400 to go. The big blind then moved all-in for \$6,000 more, and I found myself considering calling with my Jd-10d because of the pot odds. I was getting $\$4,400 + \$4,400 + \$1,000 + (8 \times \$400) + \$6,000$, or roughly \$19,000 for my \$6,000 call. I decided that the right play was to call. By the way, I didn’t feel extreme strength from the raiser.

As it turned out, the raiser had 9c-9h, and we “raced” (he was a small favorite) for a \$26,000 pot. I lost the race, and had only \$8,000 left. That’s OK, but had I won it, I would have been right back in the ball game. Shortly thereafter, I was in the big blind with Kd-5d, and the button raised it to \$5,000 to go.

I decided to take a flop for two reasons. The first was that I had the \$2,000 big blind in there already, and the second was that I thought I might have the best hand with king high. I decided to call before the flop, and then bet my last \$2,500 no matter what hit the flop.

When the flop came down A-5-4, I moved all-in, and was called by the button player, who held A-7. That was all she wrote for Phil Hellmuth that day. (They paid 27 spots, but I wasn't there just to make the money; I was there to win the whole enchilada!)

Each tournament I enter, I try to make the best decisions I can, but oftentimes—in fact, most times—I leave wishing I would have done something better.

T. J. DISPLAYS GRACE AND CLASS

I knew that poker had hit a new level when I walked into the Bicycle Club's \$5,000 buy-in WPT event in September 2003, and felt the atmosphere of the place. Was this the same \$5,000 buy-in event that had sported a \$120,000 first-place prize, and a virtually empty room, only two years earlier? Had you been there that day in 2001, you wouldn't even have recognized the place in 2003.

There sat Ben Affleck, arguably the hottest star in the film world at that moment, and local news trucks filled the parking lot. A few tables over sat Lou Diamond Phillips and Lakers owner Jerry Buss. There was more press circling the players—with nonstop clicks from the cameras—than I had ever seen before, except at the 2003 World Series of Poker.

"Do you have time for a *Sports Illustrated* interview today?" I was asked by the WPT crew. "No," I said. "No one gets time with me today, not even *SI*." (Of course, I eventually decided that it would be in my best interest to make time for *SI*.)

Still, I did relish the opportunity to welcome Affleck to the tournament, and I walked over to him and said, "Ben, welcome to the poker world." He then said, "Hi, Phil. I read your book [*Play Poker Like the Pros*]. Which animal do you think I am? I think I'm a lion." "Ben," I said, without missing a beat, "you're an aspiring eagle!" He laughed and then said, "Yeah, but it might take me twenty-two years to get there."

By the way, Ben went out of the tournament with a pocket A-A, which is a very respectable way to get eliminated. Apparently, he has

been getting lessons from top pros Amir Vahedi and Annie Duke, and it shows. He seems to be grasping no-limit Hold'em at an accelerated pace. Good luck to you, Ben; poker is happy to have you playing in its biggest and most prestigious tournaments! (Ben did ask me about lessons, and he even knew my going rate, but I told him he could have one free day of lessons.)

The final table came down to T. J. Cloutier, Paul Phillips, and Mel Judah. T. J. and Paul had most of the chips, but Mel kept hanging on. First place paid a whopping \$570,000. There they sat, on the World Poker Tour stage, with lights, cameras, and celebrities all over the place. T. J. opened on the button with 2-2, and Mel moved all-in with K-10 suited. T. J. had enough money in the pot that this was a simple call for him, and the hands were flipped faceup. With a flop of 10-9-4, followed by 7-3, Mel doubled up.

Three rounds later, T. J. opened again on the button, and Mel moved all-in again, this time with K-J. T. J. called quickly with A-10 (T. J. told me later he has noticed that Mel plays king high for big bets, and that T. J. has known about this tendency for years), and the hands were flipped faceup again. The flop came down 8-8-3, followed by a queen, and T. J. thus would win the pot, have nearly \$1 million in chips, and eliminate Mel to face Paul heads-up for the title and cash. Mel stood up to leave as the last card was being dealt, but the last card was a jack! T. J. looked chagrined, but I know the metal he is made of—titanium.

Then, after countless all-ins for Mel, the chip stacks stood at about \$500,000 per player: ladies and gentleman, we had ourselves a poker game! Paul continued to attack aggressively before the flop with raises, and T. J. and Mel let him go, occasionally moving over the top of him, to counter his overaggressive play. T. J. knew one thing: that when the big money went all-in, he liked his hand! He didn't mind Paul making steals, he didn't mind Mel making moves. It was all about that one big hand at that point; and T. J. almost always has the best of it when it comes up.

It happened so quickly it was scary. T. J. raised it from the small blind, put in the chips just as he had two rounds earlier when he

raised it up, Paul moved all-in from the big blind, and Mel folded. The chips were stacked exactly the same way, and the exact same amount was bet—if Paul had been paying attention to body language, then T. J. had shown him a tell meaning “I’m weak.” (A tell that wasn’t true; T. J. had shown Paul a “false tell.”) He was luring Paul into thinking that Paul could take this pot away, too, by moving all-in before the flop. T. J. had J-J, and he was selling his hand perfectly.

It turned out that Paul had 7-7, which is a reasonable hand to play in any case. Paul announced all-in, and T. J. immediately said, “I call.” T. J. had been setting a trap, and he already knew what he would do if Paul moved all-in on him.

A little background, before we move on with that hand. Playing against Chris “Jesus” Ferguson in the 2000 WSOP, T. J. had A-Q against Chris’s A-9, and Chris hit a nine on the last card for a \$4.4 million pot. In the last Tournament of Champions, T. J. had A-J, with a board of 8-9-J, when he called all-in against 10-8 for Brian Saltus; Brian made a straight on the end. In the WSOP another year, when T. J. put his money in before the flop with the best hand, Ad-Qd, against Humberto Brenes’s 6s-9s, T. J. lost when the flop came 9-9-5. With three players left in the WSOP another year, T. J. lost a monster pot with Q-K against Kevin McBride’s Jd-9d. T. J.’s luck in the big pots in the biggest, most prestigious events hasn’t been too good, but he is recognized nonetheless as one of the greatest poker tournament players who ever lived.

So here we had one more pot, in one more high-profile tournament, where T. J. had the best of it, and one more pot where T. J. was going to lose. The J-J was a 4.5-to-1 favorite over the 7-7, and the flop was perfect for T. J.: Ad-5s-2d. At this point, a quick “suit check” showed that Paul could win with a diamond-diamond finish (he had the 7d, and T. J. didn’t have a diamond with his J-J), but this was a very good flop for T. J. The turn card was a seven!

T. J. looked disgusted, and he shook his head in disbelief; he shouted something to a friend in the crowd—yikes, what a brutal card. T. J. now needed a jack on the last card for a \$1 million pot, or

he would finish third, but it was not to be. The final card was a nine, and T. J. exited shaking Paul's and Mel's hands. Class all the way.

Could it be? Was T. J. really out? Did he just lose three decisions in a row, plus a big pot where he had Qd-Jd, and a board of 9d-8d-6s against Paul? Did he just lose a \$1 million pot where he was a 4.5-to-1 favorite? Yes, T. J. was gone, and I watched as he handled his postgame speech with eloquence and class. Was T. J. down afterward? Yes, T. J. was down, but he is never, ever out!

“MR. MOVE ALL-IN”

I'll tell you all the truth right here, right now: I'm not sleeping well these days. I keep having nightmares about a guy who raised me or reraised me 14 times on day two of the 2003 Foxwood's World Poker \$10,000 Buy-In Championship Event, and won them all. What happened to the “three strikes and you're out” rule?

Of course, I continued my smooth play and ran my chips up to \$840,000 and second place in chips, and I knew that I would get my opponent soon for a big number. Hoyt Corkins was playing the role of “Mr. Move All-in” this tournament, and he was doing it well.

If it had stopped there, then I wouldn't have minded. After all, I did have all those chips, and I knew that I would nail Hoyt for all or most of his chips soon. Didn't he know that I knew what he was doing? Didn't he know that I knew that he was making moves on me with weak hands?

Normally, I would say to someone using that strategy against me, “You keep messing with me and I'll bust you.” That had happened so often in the past—I have busted so many players who overplayed their hands against me—but I didn't want to tip Hoyt off to it. I would let him run me over and then *bam*, it would be over for him, and he would leave the tournament wondering what the heck had happened to him.

Protect his chips? Hoyt apparently didn't know that you're supposed to do that. This was OK with me. Sooner or later, I was going to catch him, and then Mike Matusow would say, “Phil, why do they always give you their chips?! It's so sick, dude.”

How about this scenario: Hoyt raises Phil 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 times, and wins them all. Still I didn't mind, for I knew what was coming, and Hoyt apparently didn't know or care. Protect your chips, ha!

I sat back and watched Hoyt reraise "Mo" Ibrahim with 3-3, making it \$180,000 to go, and then watched as the flop came down A-J-9, and Hoyt announced, "I'm all-in." Mo almost fell off his chair while calling the \$300,000-plus bet with his A-K. "Now it's over for Hoyt," I thought. I was calmly watching the hand end when I thought, "Hoyt will raise a bunch of pots in a row, and maybe give all his chips away quickly." Hoyt then raised the next three pots in a row, and I let him go. He was down to under \$900,000, and I was up at about \$1.1 million, when I looked down at a nine in the small blind, and made up the \$6,000 to complete the blinds.

The flop came down 9-6-2 off suit, and I thought, "I have looked at only one card, but I have a feeling of strength [I did have at least top pair so far]. Let me bet out, and he'll raise me as usual with nothing." So I bet out \$25,000, and Hoyt raised it \$45,000 more. Now I looked back at a jack kicker, and I thought, "Now is the time for him to give me all of those chips." So I just called, to trap him further. The next card was a seven, and now I thought, "Let me check one more time and bet big on the last card."

The last card was another seven, and now I bet out \$80,000, feeling that there was no way for me to lose here. He could have had a straight draw, or made three sevens, but I didn't think so. Hoyt then raised me \$80,000, and I quickly called him. I had set him up this hand, and now I was reaping the rewards.

He then flipped up J-7 (which made three sevens), and I shouted, "No!" I got up from the table in total shock, and wandered over to the TV commentator's booth. Did this hand really just happen, did he just raise me drawing dead to 7-7 to make any money? (How much would he have won if it had come an eight and another straight card? Not much.) And what if just one jack had hit the board instead of 7-7, how much would he have given me then?

What if, for example, a random card like a queen had hit on the

end? I was betting \$80,000 unless a straight card came off—and believe you me, he was calling with a pair of sevens.

He was supposed to go below \$700,000, and I was supposed to go above \$1.3 million. “Fine,” I tried to tell myself, “he hit the miracle, but he will still give me all of his chips eventually.”

A little while later I raised it up with Kh-9h, and Hoyt called me. This was a first: Hoyt just called me, with Ac-Jc. The flop was all his, As-Kc-10c, and I checked and he bet \$80,000. I quickly called, and the turn card was the Kd. I checked, and then Hoyt checked. I made three kings, but he did have some outs with an ace, 2-8 of clubs, or a queen. The river was an ace, and I checked again, and then he bet \$130,000, and I quickly called.

I do like the way Hoyt played this hand, though. On every street, he bet that he had the best hand, and he checked when I hit the three kings. Even still, it was pretty unlucky for me that a king, and then an ace, came up. Meanwhile, Hoyt had raised me close to 35 hands, and I’d won one stinking pot!

Then, with the blinds at \$15,000–\$30,000, I watched Hoyt move all-in at least half of the hands, and Mo and I kept giving it up to him, folding until we could find a way to nail Hoyt once. Both Mo and I knew what Hoyt was doing, and I limped into the small blind three consecutive times, followed by Hoyt, who said, “I’m all-in.” Didn’t he know that I would limp in with any big hand that I had, and call him soon?

Protecting chips? Ha! It was so scary to watch someone get away with playing like this for even 30 minutes, much less 7 or 8 hours. Finally, Hoyt had moved on me 40-plus times, and the blinds had reached \$25,000–\$50,000. I took the first \$50,000 big blind (3 hours and 1 minute into the thing), and that time Mo moved all-in on me. I smelled weakness as I looked down at A-6, and I asked for a chip count, to get a feel for what I had to do, and to ponder the strength of Mo’s hand.

Mo had raised \$285,000, and I had only \$265,000. If I folded, I would need to make a move within the next two hands. Or I could take what I believed was the best hand then. I announced, “I need to

call you here, Mo,” and Mo then flipped up 10-J off suit. Here it was: I was a 3-to-2 favorite to be back in the ball game, a 3-to-2 favorite to receive at least \$560,000, rather than \$280,000 for third.

Mo would have had \$20,000 left if I had won, but this pot was effectively for third-place prize money. The flop was K-Q-4, and I was thinking, “Pair the board.” But the next card off was an ace, and Mo made the straight, and I headed home with \$280,000, while first place took home \$1.1 million.

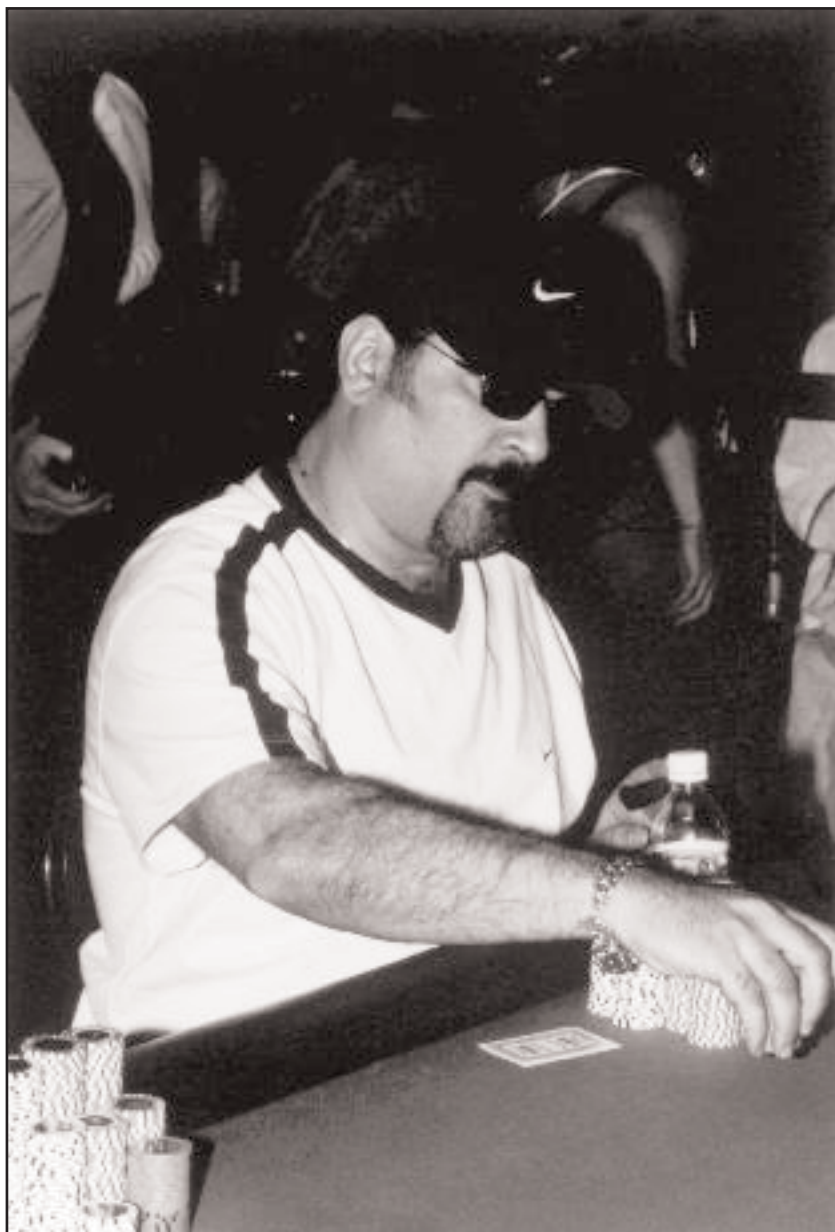
Even now, I feel good about the way I played, which is rare for me, but I’m having nightmares about what Hoyt got away with. How did he hit 7-7 or an ace after I hit three kings? How did he move on me that many times and survive? Was he that good at reading me? A lot of the times I raised, I was looking only at an ace or a king.

I feel that the style he used won’t work very often—although I often see maniac players accumulate chips that way—and it is rare for it to win a big three-day-long event. Am I bitter still? Honestly, yes; when I play at this level, I expect to win. After all, I don’t play at this level very often.

Why couldn’t I have picked up one hand in all that time I waited for him to implode? Bitter, yes, but get over it, Philly boy, that’s poker!

AMIR’S BIG CALL

I have a lot of respect for the way Amir Vahedi plays poker. In fact, for a while there, I was taking a piece of his tournament play, and ended up winning money while I backed him. Although Amir occasionally gets a little testy while playing in tournaments (not nearly as testy as I do!), he showed a lot of grace and class in defeat on many of the occasions I witnessed in 2003. As at the Bellagio in July 2003, when he was leading both tournaments he was playing in (this is really remarkable in itself), and was busted out of both within minutes of each other, but left with a very positive attitude and, believe it or not, a big smile on his face.



Amir Vahedi at the 2003 WSOP.

In Bellagio's Five Diamond World Poker Classic \$10,000 buy-in championship event in December 2003, the following unbelievable hand came up late during day two. I have seldom seen a hand like this one in all the years I've been playing poker.

With \$1,000–\$2,000 blinds, the first raise was \$3,500 to go by player X, and then Amir made it \$10,000 to go with pocket tens. The man right behind Amir, player Y, then moved all-in, and then Juha Helppi (the WPT UltimateBet.com champion) studied the scene for three minutes before going all-in from the big blind for \$35,500 total. The first-position raiser, X, then moved all-in, and the action was back to Amir. Three people had just moved all-in, and now it would cost \$25,500 more for him to call—and he only had \$30,000 left. Amir studied and studied, and finally pushed in the money to call!

What the heck was going on there? Juha flipped up A-A, X had Q-Q, and Y had A-K off suit. The flop came down 10-J-2, then a nine, followed by a seven, and Amir had won the monstrous pot with three tens.

How did Amir play this hand? I like his reraise before the flop, making it \$10,000 to go. This is pretty standard, although I sometimes just call here. I hate his call of \$25,500 more, but he was getting laid 4 to 1 on the call. You're arguing with me. You're saying that he was only a 4.5-to-1 underdog here, and that he had pot odds for the call. Not exactly. Amir had to know that at least one player had an overpair in this spot, but more than likely two players had an overpair, the way the action came down. Did anyone doubt that Juha had A-A or K-K? Of course not. Juha had slid in his last \$35,500 with only a \$1,000 big blind invested after a raise, a reraise, and an all-in. In my mind, he had to have A-A, although K-K would be believable. And how about the hands that players X and Y held? Y moved all-in after a raise and a reraise; and X moved all-in after a reraise, an all-in, and another all-in. Why should Amir cripple himself (Amir would have had only about \$5,000 left) with 10-10 in this spot? The way Amir plays poker, he had enough money to fold and still easily get to the \$140,000 in chips mark that he ended up with at the end of this spectacular hand. Amir had a clear fold.

How about player X's play with his pocket Q-Q? With only \$3,500 in the pot, it would seem like an easy fold for X after a reraise, an all-in, and another all-in from Juha (again, Juha was likely to have A-A or K-K). Unless X had only \$10,000 or less left after his initial \$3,500 raise, it was a bad call. (Of course, if X was inexperienced, then perhaps he should have put the money in and tried to get lucky for the pot odds.)

How about player Y's play with his A-K? Because Amir reraises a fair number of pots, it would seem OK to move all-in over the top of him with A-K here. (Of course, I wouldn't want to make the same move against a tight player who had reraised before the flop!) I will add that folding A-K here in this spot against Amir would be OK, too.

How about Juha's play with A-A? Of course, he had to move all-in with A-A to protect his hand—there was a lot of money in the pot already. But I don't like the stall tactic that Juha employed here. It is one thing to try to stall with A-A against one opponent (although the top players will see right through it anyway), but entirely another thing to stall around against three other active raisers, trying to lure them in when the pot is already monstrous. Juha will learn soon enough that aces don't always hold up. I would have moved all-in instantly, thus sending a message to everyone that I had A-A. Why stall around trying to pick up extra money when the pot was already so big? By the way, Juha got what he wanted: he lured Amir into the pot, only to have Amir outdraw him. Be careful what you ask for!

4

European Poker Tour

Time now to talk about some of the hands that I've played in Europe. From Late Night Poker, which was filmed in Wales, and is now on American television (on Fox); to the European Poker Championship (the "Poker EM"), the biggest Seven-Card Stud tournament on the planet, held each October in Baden, Austria; and the Masters Classics of Poker tournament held at the Holland Casino, Amsterdam.

THE POKER EM

The European Poker Championship is held annually in Baden, Austria, which is about thirty miles south of Vienna. Of all the places in Europe where this championship could have been held, it happens

to be in the one small town in Europe where I had previously spent more than one week. Back in 1989, after I had won the World Series of Poker, I traveled with a good friend of mine to stay at his parents' house in Baden.

In fact, I had played poker for a couple of days at the Casino Baden in 1989, a year before it became the venue for the European Poker Championship. One of the problems was that they imposed a 5 percent pot rake. If a pot held 400 schillings, they raked 20! In other words, all of the money ended up in the casino's coffers.

One thing I will never forget about my 1989 trip was my rude introduction to the German word *Strasse* (sounds like "STRASS-saa," means both "street" and "poker straight"). During a game of Seven-Card Stud, I would have aces up and be firing all the way, when four other players would call me down. I would then confidently flip up my hand, saying, "Aces up." They would then study my hand with confused expressions and shout, "Strasse!" and proceed to show me a five- or six-high straight and laugh.

The word *Strasse* has conjured up nightmares of bad beats and slow rolls for me ever since! In 1989, I forgot to have a winning "session" in Baden in the side games, and in 1999, I somehow failed to win a single pot in the side games! (Fortunately, I played for only about 45 minutes in the side games that year.)

The limit Seven-Card Stud European poker championship in 1999 was structured in a very unusual way. There were three qualifying events, from each of which the top 24 players out of 432 (432 the first day, 432 the second day, and 432 the third day), or 72 players total, would participate in the final. Each day you would play down to six tables, and then each table would play down from 8 to 4 players (4 each from 6 tables makes 24).

The buy-in for the three qualifying events was 3,000 schillings (about \$250) for 1,200 units of chips (yes, they call them units). In addition, one optional rebuy (3,000S for 1,200 in chips) and one optional add-on for "double chips" (3,000S, for 2,400 in chips) were allowed. But if you lost both your buy-in and your rebuy before the

fifth level, then you were out of the qualifying event (no add-on was allowed at this point).

Because making it to the sixth level and the “double-chip add-on” was so important, I figured that you would want to throw away some pretty big hands on the fourth and fifth levels if you had already used your rebuy. In fact, if you had already had your rebuy, throwing away a “rolled-up” hand before the add-on was the correct move, because you could go broke in one hand! Can you imagine having a starting hand of (A-A) A—the best possible starting hand in Stud—and then have to fold it? I find it interesting to observe some of the goofy things that you sometimes need to do in poker tournaments!

In order to play in this tournament, you also had to pay a mandatory 4,500S food charge to the casino, but the operators would provide “pretty good” unlimited food for the players whenever the casino was open. And in order to guarantee a seat in the tournament, you had to sign up with a credit card well in advance of the first day. In fact, they turned away people who hadn’t signed up in advance, because they already had their full 432-player complement.

The qualifiers were held Thursday, October 7, 1999, at 7:00 P.M., Friday at 3:30 P.M., and Saturday at 1:00 P.M. The final was held on Saturday night at 8:00, right after the last qualifier ended. Johnny Chan and Kenny “Skyhawk” Flaton were at a big disadvantage because they happened to qualify on Saturday afternoon and then had to jump right into the main event Saturday night. Johnny Chan suffered another bad break by having someone tell him that the Friday qualifying tournament was being held at 7:00 P.M. when it really began at 3:30 P.M.

Included in the final five at my table on the second day were Jack Fox, Marsha Waggoner, and me. Unfortunately, Jack ended up finishing fifth, and only four of us could make it to the main event. Some of the Americans who reached the finals were Ted Forrest, Kenny Flaton, Marsha Waggoner, Ross Lichen, Johnny Chan, and me.

I was really distraught after finishing in ninth place. I knew that the final eight would be broadcast live on the Internet in both audio and video. Because of this, I had called all of my relatives (and John Bonetti) to tell them to look for me on the live telecast, because I had a good feeling that I was going to win it. Alas, ninth place. To add insult to injury, eighth place paid nearly three times what ninth place paid (\$13,000 versus \$5,000). Oh well, someone had to finish ninth.

The tournament had a great ambience to it. Imagine a beautiful casino where everyone is well dressed, and where huge crowds watch the action and scream when key cards come off the deck. Of course, the ambience didn't seem quite as sweet when I took a really bad beat from the eventual winner of the tournament, and the crowd started screaming, "England, England, England, England!"

Not only was the difference in prize money between ninth and eighth significant, but the ninth-place finisher's name wasn't published in *Poker Europa* magazine! Be that as it may, I would probably have been equally upset had I finished in second place, although at least then I would have been over \$100,000 richer. (The heck with the money, I just like to win!)

I like the way this tournament was set up. Again, we started with about 432 players on days one, two, and three, and 24 advanced each day to the final event. Thus, a total of 72 players made the finals. With three separate events set up to determine who advanced to the final, the prize pool grew at a terrific rate. In fact, first place turned out to be about \$210,000.

As I mentioned before, at least 6 Americans made it to the finals field of 72: Marsha Waggoner, Johnny Chan, Ross Lichen, Skyhawk Flaton, Ted Forrest, and me. Three of us made the final 18 players, including Forrest, Flaton, and me. With 13 players left, the following hand came up between Englishman Paul Alterman and me. The limit was 3,000–6,000 units, the ante was 800 units, and the low card brought it in for 1,500 units. There were 6 players at my table when this hand started. The low card was a three, the next player to act folded a five, and Paul opened for 3,000 with the Qc up.

My up card was the 9c, with 9d-10c in the hole. It was now my turn to act, so I looked behind me and saw that Skyhawk and the remaining players to act had up cards lower than my 9c. The fact that no one had an up card higher than mine behind me made my pair of nines that much stronger. Immediately, I put Paul on a steal with a weak hand. Thus, I very quickly raised Paul's bet up to 6,000 units to go. Now Paul reraised to 9,000 units to go. I asked how much money he had left, and he said he had 1,800 units more, or 10,800 total. Obviously, he wouldn't reraise here without having me beat (or at least without a real hand, like J-Q-K), because he knows that I'm calling his last 5,800 units for sure. So I just called, thinking that if he paired his up-card queen, then I might be able to fold and save 1,800 units.

On the next card, he caught a dangerous-looking Kc, to make his board Qc-Kc. I caught nothing in particular (a three) and called his 1,800-unit all-in bet. Now we were forced to flip our cards faceup for the audience, which by now was pretty huge. Paul showed me just what I expected him to have in the hole: the 5d-6h. Excuse me, what did you say?! Yes, you heard me correctly: his hole cards were 5d-6h! Why in the world hadn't he just folded his hand when I made it 6,000 units to go, like the other 99 percent of the world would have done? Again, he had to have known that there was a strong likelihood that I was going to call his last 5,800, since I'd had 34,000 units to start the hand. I guess he thought I would fold for his last 5,800. No problem, if he wanted to give me his chips with his (5-6) Q versus my (9-10) 9, then fine. I had to be at least a 3-to-1 or 4-to-1 favorite.

I'm not kidding when I tell you that I was about to laugh out loud at the absurdity of his hand and play, but before I could recover from my shock, the dealer dealt out the fifth card. (When someone is all-in at the Poker EM, the remaining cards are dealt very quickly, and the last card is dealt faceup.)

Paul now caught a Qd, and suddenly it wasn't so funny anymore. Now his board read Qc-Kc-Qd with 5d-6h in the exposed hole. At this point, I still believed I was going to win this hand. For

one thing, I felt as if I deserved to win the hand. For another, I've seen too many weird plays like the one Paul made die on the vine. After Paul was delivered his last card faceup, I could see that he still had only one pair of queens. I still had only one pair of nines, but with an open-ended straight draw (9-9-10-8-J-3). Now I needed a queen or a seven for a straight or another pair to win this hand. Any three, seven, eight, nine, ten, jack, or queen would win the pot for me.

Meanwhile, the crowd was shouting very loudly and lustily, "England, England, England, England!" What was this, the World Cup? I hadn't heard any shouting to this point in the tournament (or in any other poker tournament, ever!), so I was surprised, and a bit taken aback. The shouting, on top of the bad beat I was taking, annoyed me quite a bit, especially since the crowd was so loud. There's no crying in baseball, and there's no shouting and chanting in poker! But I knew one thing: I couldn't let anything affect me. If I did, then I might play badly afterward. I was here for one reason: to win this thing.

The last card turned out to be a king, and I lost the pot. But I still had over 20,000 units in front of me. If I had won that pot, then I would have had the chip lead in the tournament with roughly 45,000 units. Eventually, I self-destructed a bit—I think I was still on tilt from the shock of losing that pot to Paul—and wound up finishing in ninth place.

Yes, that was a brutal pot to lose, but perhaps I would have won the Poker EM anyway if only I had continued to play great poker all the way to the end. Then that pot would have been a long-forgotten story. But I admit it, I went on tilt. We all go on tilt sometimes.

After I was eliminated, I watched Ted Forrest play a brilliant game, only to fall short and finish in fourth place. I believe Ted was more upset than I was, because he smelled the first-place title more than I had. And Ted already has a World Championship title (a WSOP bracelet) in Seven-Card Stud and has thus proved that he is capable of winning the big Seven-Card Stud tournaments. At least

Ted walked away with about \$65,000 for fourth place to console himself with. Paul Alterman took advantage of his good fortune—he did play very strong Stud the rest of the way—and went on to capture first place.

POKER IN AMSTERDAM, 1998

My younger sister Kerry rode bicycles on the U.S. women's professional circuit, and on the European circuit, based in Italy. Her dream was to make the U.S. Olympic team. Kerry has told me about the differences between the U.S. women's circuit and the European women's circuit after riding in both in 1999. In Europe, bicycling is on a whole different level, in terms of both respect and media attention. Sounds familiar; before 2002, the same distinction held true for poker.

On November 8, 1998, I headed to Amsterdam to play in the Masters Classics of Poker tournament, which was being held at the beautiful Holland Casino Amsterdam. When I arrived, I picked up a copy of the biggest newspaper in Holland. Right there on the front page of the front section was a big article about the poker tournament! John Bonetti, Mike Sexton, tournament director Mike Ros, and I appeared on the national news.

During our stay in Amsterdam, separate camera crews followed Mike Sexton and David “Devilfish” Ulliott around for a couple of days. In England, earlier in 1998, the final table of a poker tournament was broadcast on national television (*Late Night Poker*).

Had we seen differences back then between press coverage for the U.S. poker circuit and the coverage for the well-organized European poker circuit? You bet. It's nice, now, in 2004, to have huge press coverage at the World Series of Poker, the Legends of Poker, and the Los Angeles Poker Classic tournaments. But the Europeans are still ahead of us in these matters. The European Poker Players Association (EPPA) organizes tournaments, and even goes so far as to rank its own players at its own Web site (much as the PGA tour does here).

Every tournament they had there sold out (220-plus players), save the 5,000-guilder (\$2,500) no-limit Hold'em event. And even that one managed to pay about 170,000 guilders (\$80,000) for first place! On Monday, November 9, American Jack Fox won the 500-guilder buy-in, 500-guilder rebuy, and 500-guilder add-on limit Hold'em tournament. First place was about 90,000 guilders (about \$42,000). Jack seems to make a lot of final tables, but hasn't often hoisted a trophy. Congratulations on breaking through, Jack!

On Tuesday, the two-day 5,000-guilder no-limit Hold'em championship event began. I played rather poorly and eliminated myself early. On Thursday, the two-day 1,500-guilder event, with one optional add-on and one optional rebuy, began. It turned out that this event paid about the same \$80,000 first prize that the championship event paid. For this event, I came to play!

As I ruthlessly attacked, and slid my chips all over the map, I began to sense fear in my opponents. After about seven hours of play, there were about 20 players left, and I was chip leader with about 50,000 units worth of chips. The safe, rational, and clearly the best option involved slowing down my play in order to ensure that I made it to day two (the final nine).

But my plans went awry. Which is to say, I got tangled up in a little mess. The only other player in the tournament who had over 35,000 units (he had 45,000) raised on his button, which was my big blind. The blinds were 1,000–2,000, and he opened for 10,000 units. The last time he had opened for 10,000 units, he showed A-A! After the small blind folded, I looked down at Ah-6h and began to study.

Normally, I would fold this hand right here, but I was putting the fear of God into my opponents this day. So I gave my instincts, so far perfect, a chance to read the man. After a minute of studying, I decided that I had the best hand and, in any case, that he certainly couldn't call me with 8-8 or 9-9. In one single and daring—albeit stupid—second, I moved in my whole 50,000 units. I was thinking too much about the 10,000-unit bet plus the other 5,000 in antes and blinds that I would win when he folded his hand.

Well, I hadn't studied him long enough, because deep down inside, I knew he was strong. As my greedy little hands shoved in the chips, I noticed that he was beating me into the pot. Ouch! What had I done to myself? I had risked an almost certain final table in an ill-timed and poorly conceived bluff. I had forgotten a basic rule of two-day poker tournaments: always make it to day two!

Very quickly, it was over. He flipped his Q-Q faceup, and the flop was a queen (K-Q-4), with no hearts. But wait a minute! On fourth street, a jack came off, and the board was K-Q-4-J. Could a ten be coming for me to make a straight? No, it was another jack. One more trip to Europe in search of tournament glory and a pile of money had ended with a close call. Damn, I hate it when that happens!

PHIL'S KEY HAND AT THE 2000 POKER EM

The pageantry and prestige associated with the Poker EM is second only to that at the World Series of Poker. Winning the prestigious three-day-long Poker EM would be a nice feather in anyone's cap. Unfortunately, my Seven-Card Stud tournament record from 1987 to 1999 was abysmal. But since August 1999, I have had something of a breakthrough in Seven-Card Stud tournaments. I devoted that August of 1999 to improving my tournament poker game. Every day of that month, I played in the Legends of Poker tournaments, and put maximum effort into analyzing the way I was playing. From that point on, I made final tables in Stud at the 1999 Legends of Poker, the U.S. Poker Open Championship Stud event (\$4,000 buy-in) in late 1999, and the Carnivale of Poker Stud event in January 2000. Of course, I finished ninth in the Poker EM in Vienna in October 1999, and I made it deep in both World Series of Poker Seven-Card Stud events in 2000, as well. For five Stud events in a row, starting in August 1999, I made it down to the final nine or better.

But there was one common theme in every one of those events:

I blew it down the stretch. How thrilling, finally, after 12 years, to break through in Seven-Card Stud tournaments! To learn how to play tournament Stud on another level, after all those years. Then, actually to play on that level for many hours in each Stud event, and to make the final table, only to self-destruct—and I know I did—late in all those events.

Ouch! It still hurts when I think of all of those blown final tables in my mind's eye. The pain is especially strong when I think about one particular Stud event that I played in, the \$5,000 buy-in Seven-Card Stud event at the 2000 World Series of Poker. I played my heart out all day long and accumulated the chip lead, only to play poorly late at night, give away virtually all of my chips, and finish nineteenth. Let's move on—even writing about that ugly WSOP Stud performance causes me pain!

In 2000, at the Poker EM, I vowed that if I was in a position to win it, I would not blow it again, as I had in 1999. If I was unlucky down the stretch, then so be it. But, please, oh please, just don't let me give away my chance to win another Seven-Card Stud title!

In 2000, as in 1999, I made it through to the finals on the second round of qualifying. After 72 of us began the final championship event, I quickly took the chip lead, and managed to maintain that lead all the way down to the final two tables. At this point, I was thinking, "Just don't finish ninth again!" The final eight players were going to win a lot more money and, as before, they were going to play live in audio and video on the Internet at www.pokerem.com. I told myself to pay close attention to reality, and make no bonehead plays this time around!

I was enormously relieved when I did make it to the final table, even though I was now fourth place in chips. I still had not been all-in during the event, and therefore I couldn't have gone broke, not up until this point. I had the low card three of the first five hands at the final table, but I refused to let the fact that I had gone from \$33,000 to about \$23,000 by "low carding" bother me. When you are the "low card" in Stud, you put in a bet to start the action. Late in a tournament, this can be very expensive. (I have a pet peeve about

Stud—when players get angry at the dealers because they have the low card too often, especially when they’re winning all of the money during that particular dealer’s deal. If you want to cry while playing Stud, then at least wait until you lose a couple of pots!)

I knew that if I got upset about the fact that I had lost almost \$10,000 holding the low card, I would become emotional and lose focus. I thought, “It’s best for me just to concentrate on playing as well as I can play, and to let the cards take care of themselves.” Again, I could handle getting unlucky and losing the title, but I couldn’t bear to self-destruct, play badly, and give the title away.

When we hit a 10-minute break with four of us left, I didn’t even know what first place paid. The first hand after the break, we broke a player, and were down to three. That was when the following hand came up between Christoph Haller and me. The antes were \$2,000 per player, and the low card brought it in for \$4,000, with a \$10,000–\$20,000 limit. I was the low card with a four up and 4-2 in the hole. So I threw in the mandatory \$4,000 as the low card. Christoph completed the bet to \$10,000 total with a king up and A-J in the hole, and the other player folded a nine.

While trying to read Christoph, I hesitated for a moment. I asked myself, “Is my pair of fours the best hand right now?” At this moment, I couldn’t read Christoph, so I just called the \$6,000 raise. I caught a ten, and Christoph caught a six. He was first to act, and he bet \$10,000. Suddenly, it came to me that my pair of fours was the best hand. I don’t know exactly how it came to me, but I guess I had picked up something from the way Christoph bet his hand, or from his facial expressions.

My ability to read other people well has allowed me to win many no-limit Hold’em titles in the past, and a good read is especially deadly in no-limit Hold’em. With this new read, I raised the bet \$10,000 more, or \$20,000 total to go. Christoph called the raise. When he just called my \$10,000 raise, I felt more strongly than ever that my pair of fours was the best hand.

I caught another ten, for a board of 4-10-10 with hole cards of 4-2, and thus made two pair. Christoph caught a jack, for a board

of K-6-J and hole cards of A-J, and made a pair of jacks. I bet \$20,000, and Christoph called. I didn't like this. I just wanted to win the pot right then and there, when I had paired tens, and bet \$20,000. At this point, I was pretty sure that Christoph had a pair of jacks, or possibly a pair of kings. It also occurred to me that he might have an open-ended straight draw (10-J-Q-K), with Q-10 as hole cards.

The next card, I caught a nine, for (4-2) 4-10-10-9, and Christoph caught an eight, for (A-J) K-6-J-8. I bet his last \$20,000, and he called the bet. Christoph was now all-in, and effectively, so was I (with less than \$10,000 left). When you are all-in in the Poker EM, you are asked to expose all of your cards, and then the last card is dealt faceup. Looking at Christoph's hole cards, I could see that I had the best hand, but now I needed it to hold up.

In poker slang, "Here comes the skill card." I missed my full house (ten or four), which would have shut him out; but fortunately for me, Christoph missed as well. Thus, I won the pot, and busted Christoph. I still remember the roar from the crowd surrounding the final table at Casino Baden. Wow! There was so much screaming that I almost lost my focus. My emotions tried to run away with me, but I told myself, "It's not over yet. Let everyone else celebrate. You stay stone still and finish this thing."

The next hand, I won \$30,000 from my lone opponent. Again, the screaming was crazy, and included the sweet-sounding cheering from my two sisters (Kerry Hellmuth and Molly Hellmuth) and my brother-in-law (Bob Soderstrom), all of whom clearly had been enjoying the free alcohol that night—in abundance. (My family was literally screaming something that sounded like this: "Yada Brada! Yada Brada! Yada Brada"). Again, I struggled with my emotions, which were trying to run away with me, but I remained focused and ready to win this thing. The next hand, I won a \$200,000 pot and the Poker EM. I finally let my emotions run away with me!

Starting from when four players remained, it took merely four hands. Boom, it was over. It ended shockingly quickly. I was feeling incredible, as I hugged my family, posed for hundreds of pictures, and then drank champagne from my new trophy! I finally found out

what first place paid when they handed me a silver platter holding 1.8 million Austrian schillings (about \$110,000)! How great to have some family there, to celebrate with me at the end. How great to be lucky enough to win the Poker EM. How great to finally finish a Seven-Card Stud tournament!

QUALIFYING FOR LATE NIGHT POKER III IN 2000

One day in late May 2000, I opened an e-mail from a Rob Gardner in Cardiff, Wales, inviting me to play in a no-limit Hold'em poker tournament called Late Night Poker III, where cameras would be installed beneath the table to show the players' cards and the players' faces when they looked at their cards.

"Wow!" I thought. "Sounds pretty cool to me." I had heard from players living in London that *Late Night Poker* attracted over a million viewers each time out, and that it was bringing new players into British poker every day! Apparently, now that they could see how the game was played, the British public was saying, "I can play that game."

After several rounds of e-mails, I learned all about the format for the tournament and wired my £1,500 (about \$2,250 U.S.) buy-in to Rob Gardner and company. Forty-nine players were invited to this event, including Surinder Sunar, David "Devilfish" Ulliott (the defending champion), Sir Clive Sinclair (the famous inventor), and Paul Alterman (the winner of Casino Baden's 1999 European Championship). I asked the organizers if they would let my writing pal Andy Glazer play in this event, but they said that people were already "fighting to get in" to the event. Apparently, this was a poker player's chance to become famous (or at least known) in Britain, not to mention the fact that the tournament was adding £20,000 (\$30,000) to the prize pool. *Late Night Poker* is so big in the U.K. that Jesse May, one of the commentators for the show, signed autographs one night when we were having a few drinks at the Cardiff Hilton.

The tournament consisted of seven one-table satellites, each taped, with seven players at each of them. The winner of each would advance to the final. The seven second-place finishers would all play one last satellite for the right to play in the eight-player final. Each satellite would become a television show in its own right.

I played on Tuesday, July 5, 2000, at 7:00 P.M. Of course, I made sure to fly in early and get a couple of days' rest, which seemed sensible, considering that I was flying all the way to Wales for just one event. Yeah, right! I left San Francisco at 9:00 A.M. on July 4, and after a stop at JFK, I arrived at London's Heathrow airport at around 8:00 A.M. on the fifth. After a three-hour bus ride to Cardiff, it was nearly 1:00 in the afternoon, and I still hadn't slept a wink during the entire trip! After I checked into the Cardiff Hilton and my head finally hit the pillow, it was almost 1:30 P.M. *Late Night Poker* was shuttling the players over to the venue at 5:00 P.M. from the Hilton.

Great! Three hours of sleep after flying halfway across the world. Actually, I wasn't panicked at all, because I knew that if I went for a run, right before the event started, I would feel great for the next five or six hours. (In fact, I believe that even if I've been up for three days straight, a run allows me to be at my best for about five hours, minimum.) I also had a backup plan. I knew that if I didn't finish first or second in my event I could fly to Milan, Italy, and watch my sister Kerry, who was racing for the Master Team Carpe Diem (an Italian bicycle-racing team) in the Giro d'Italia stage race. (It turned out that she finished about 50th. Nice job, girl!) In fact, having a backup plan made me less nervous about my prospects that first night. After all, Italy is said to be really beautiful in July.

After a horrible three-hour sleep, I took a refreshing 30-minute run and was ready to go. The tournament was set up so that play would last about four hours, which isn't too bad for a seven-player no-limit Hold'em tournament. The setup called for tight play, and I was playing extremely tight and well within myself. I was pleased with the way I was playing, and I began to accumulate a large chip lead over the field.

During one particular hand, an aggressive player raised it up in

late position when I was in the big blind with 9-9. Normally, I think I would have reraised right here, but after studying my opponent for a minute I had a strange feeling that he had J-J. So I decided to just call his raise. When the flop came down A-K-6, I checked, and then folded when he made a medium-size bet. I guess I missed the opportunity to check-raise him off of his J-J on the flop (to bluff him out), instead opting to fold, and thus to show him how tightly I had played my 9-9 in this five-handed game. If I had bothered to study him when he bet the flop, then I might have sensed weakness and bluffed him out.

Instead, I flipped up the 9-9 and announced that I had a feeling that he had me beat pre-flop. He then showed me J-J! I thought, "Wow, that's cool, now I know that I'm reading people well today." Imagine if I had reraised him pre-flop: I might then have "gone" (literally also!) with this hand (played it all-in), and although I might still have hit a nine, I most likely would have been eliminated right there. In other words, I was feeling really good about losing the minimum to the 9-9, and I was feeling like my reading powers were strong that day.

As I continued to build up a big chip lead, things just seemed to be smooth and easy. I mean, I was playing as well as I could play, and I was catching some cards as well. When we reached heads-up (the final two), I had about 60 percent of the chips. Now that I was heads-up, the idea of going to Milan and watching my sister in the Giro d'Italia was out of the question. Because, at the very least, I would now have to play three nights later in the second-place finishers tournament on Friday night. And, of course, I was hoping to win my event and qualify for Saturday's final right now.

After a short battle, I limped in on the button with Jd-4d, and my opponent raised with Ah-Qh. I decided that he was making a move, so I announced that I was reraising him all-in. He called me quickly with his Ah-Qh, and I said, "Oops." The flop was Kd-7d-2c, so I had flopped a flush draw. I thought this was a pretty good flop for me. Now I could lock him out if a diamond hit, which would complete my flush.

The next card was the 7s, for Kd-7d-2c-7s, and I now needed a diamond, a jack, or a four to win my table. The final card was the Js, making me two pair—jacks and sevens. “Yes,” I thought, “nice card!” I had won my event, but not in the fashion that I had wanted. I had put my money in with the worst hand and gotten lucky. I always prefer to win with the best hand; but, on the other hand, I had played beautifully all day to put myself in position to “suck out” (get lucky) when I was heads-up.

Now I could finally get the rest I so dearly needed, because the finals were scheduled for Saturday at 2:00 P.M. (at exactly the same time that Venus Williams was to begin her finals match down the road at Wimbledon).

Of the starting 49 players, the eight players that eventually advanced to the finals were Paul Alterman, seat 1; Phil Hellmuth, seat 2; “Mad” Marty Wilson, seat 3; Mike Magee, seat 4; Barney Boatman, seat 5; Adam Heller, seat 6; Korosh, seat 7; and Mohammed Revri, seat 8.

Each one-table event became an hour-long television program on Channel 3 in London. With *LNP* putting cameras beneath the table to show the hole cards, the British public was beginning to see the skill, beauty, and inherent drama in no-limit Hold'em. Basically, *LNP* is making poker popular in the U.K.! The European players tell me that record numbers of new players are coming to the U.K. card rooms to play poker.

With a celebrity event, seven one-table events, the second-chance one-table event (for the second-place finishers), and the final itself, you had a 10-week run on British television! Of course, the 90-minute final was the jewel of the 10-week run. Some 1.7 million people tuned in on December 21, 2000, to watch the eight of us play for a £50,000 (\$70,000) first prize. For more information about Late Night Poker III (videos, hand info, interviews, etc.), go to www.poker-in-the-uk.com.

When I arrived at the studio for the final, this fellow Korosh was verbally all over me, trying to engage me in some sort of . . . who knows what. Rather than be amiable like all the rest of us, he seemed

to attack me personally. Maybe he thought he could get me on tilt by acting really weird toward me, or perhaps he was just a little bit intimidated by the seemingly easy way that I had won my one-table event (and the fact that I'm a World Champion). I don't know, but sometimes people are intimidated by me at the final table, so maybe that was it.

In any case, there was no way that I would have let his gamesmanship (whether intentional or not) affect me in any way. I've had people take this tack against me many times in my life, and it usually ends up hurting them, especially since everyone knows that this type of thing is bad form.

About one hour into the final, I was on the point of becoming one of the short stacks when I picked up K-K and raised the pot. Barney Boatman smooth-called me with 9-9 in the big blind. With four of us taking the flop, it came 8-8-3, and I bet out. Barney check-raised me most of his chips, and I quickly decided that my K-K was the best hand, and called with all of my remaining chips. Fortunately, my K-K held up for me to win a big pot, and now I had a comfortable amount of chips again.

As time passed in the final, I noticed that Paul Alterman was playing extremely good poker. He was playing very conservatively, not risking many chips in big confrontations. Paul was the reigning Poker EM champ (the European Poker Champion) at the time, and I could see that he knew what he was doing in no-limit Hold'em. I was glad to see that Paul was on my right.

But back to the action. Korosh and I finally got tangled up after I limped in with Kh-Jd, and the flop was Js-9s-2s. I bet out on the flop, and Korosh moved all-in with 9h-5s. After studying for a long moment, I decided that my Kh-Jd was the best hand, and called his all-in move. Fortunately for me, my hand held up when Korosh missed his draw (he'd had a flush draw with his five of spades and three spades on the board, and a pair of nines), and now I had a huge chip lead.

Another key pot for me came up when two players limped in and I decided to raise the pot on the button with Ah-2d. Mike

Magee decided his A-10 was the best hand, and moved all-in from the big blind. Fortunately for me, his raise “priced me in.” In other words, he didn’t have enough chips to force me to fold my hand for his reraise, and so I reluctantly called him. I think the raise was £4,000, but the pot (including his raise) was around £12,000. So I was getting about 3-to-1 odds on the call.

The flop was 3h-5h-Jh, which was a very good flop for me. I had flopped the nut-flush draw, a straight draw (I needed a four), and a pair draw (I needed a two). The turn card was the 10s, to make Mike a pair of tens, so that now I needed a heart or a four to win the pot. The river was the sweet 4c, making me a five-high straight and the winning hand. Although I wouldn’t have been in trouble had I lost this pot, winning it gave me a really huge chip lead.

When we got down to three-handed, I had about 50 percent of the chips, and Paul Alterman and Adam Heller had about 25 percent apiece. (By the way, Venus Williams had just won Wimbledon an hour before, down the road, and another American, in a less publicized event, was close to winning his own event as well—me.)

After a short break to color up the chips, play resumed, and I picked up Ad-Ac in the big blind. Paul limped in with Qc-10s in the small blind, I raised it up, he quickly called my pre-flop raise, and then the flop came down 6c-9c-Jc. Paul checked with his big draw. He had a queen-high flush draw and an open-ended straight draw. So I made a big bet with my pair of aces and my ace-high flush draw. Paul then moved all-in, and I called him like a shot.

We flipped the hands up for the cameras, and naturally I was rooting for a club to hit, to lock up this big pot. Lo and behold, the first card off was the 7c, making me the nut flush and ending all the drama. (By the way, it’s a good thing for me that that club came off, because the next card was the Kd, which gave Paul a straight!)

Now it was down to Adam Heller and me, but I had him three to one in chips. Adam began to move in on me a lot, so I just waited for the right spot, hoping to catch him a little bit weak. Finally, I called him with a Qd-Jh to his 10s-9c, and I was a 2-to-1 favorite to win LNP III. But the flop came down 6c-10c-Ac, which was terrible

for me. With this flop, Adam bought a pair of tens with a nine-high flush draw. Things didn't look good for me after that flop; I needed a jack, a queen, or a king that wasn't a club, and I needed him to miss his club-flush draw.

Fourth street brought the Qh I needed, and now Adam needed a ten, a nine, or a club. The last card missed Adam, and I was the Late Night Poker III Champion! (*Late Night Poker* is now playing in the states on Fox television.)

I found the Cardiff Hilton bar full of European poker players, and I bought several rounds of drinks for everyone, to celebrate. (About then, Venus Williams took her private jet back to the United States. The top poker players can't afford private jets yet, but if poker keeps on growing here in the states, then Gulfstream IV, here I come!)

A KEY MISTAKE AT THE WHUPC

The 2003 WHUPC tournament (World Heads-up Poker Championships; "heads-up" means one-on-one poker) was held in Vienna and run like the NCAA basketball tournament: you lose, you go home! But don't worry if you're eliminated early, for there's a full two-week-long poker tournament wrapped around the WHUPC.

The uniquely designed heads-up tables were created by TCS (one of the world's leading manufacturers of gaming equipment and tables, based in London) exclusively for the WHUPC. These heads-up tables are set up so that you can see the hole cards on camera. In 2003, Sky Sports showed the finals worldwide, including "Miami" John Cernuto winning the whole enchilada in an exciting finale.

In case you would like to practice your heads-up no-limit Hold'em game for this event, the WHUPC starts the matches with 2,500 euros in chips and 25–50 euro blinds. The blinds go up only one time, after the first hour has ended, to 50–100 euros, and it seems to me this gives the players enough time to work their chips.

In the finals of the WHUPC in Vienna in June 2003, the following hand came up between "Miami" John Cernuto and Anthony

(pronounced “AN-toe-nee”) Chapman. I was doing the commentary in the television truck for Sky Sports, which had allowed me to see the players’ hole cards. At this point, John had 60,000 euros to Anthony’s 100,000 (both players had started with 80,000 euros). With the blinds at 750–1,500 euros, Anthony called 750 euros more on the button with the 6h-5h. Now John popped it up 2,500 euros more with Jd-Js, and Anthony called the raise.

The flop came down 8s-7h-4h, and John checked. Then Anthony checked. What a flop for Anthony; he’d flopped the best possible hand! The flop gave him a made straight, with a straight-flush draw. It also looked like a great flop for John’s hand—after all, it was three cards under a jack. When Anthony checked this flop after John checked, it proved to be a fatal mistake. If Anthony had just bet something around or over 5,000 euros, right then and there, I believe he would have forced John’s hand. You see, John had checked the flop with a very strong hand, presumably to raise any bet that Anthony might have made here. And John has a propensity to bet all of his chips. After all, what is John going to do with J-J, after he raised pre-flop and caught an 8s-7h-4h flop, and then checked the flop? (Answer: probably move all-in and go broke!)

The next card off was a dangerous-looking eight, for 8s-7h-4h-8c, and now John made a small defensive bet of 4,000 euros. Again, Anthony made a big mistake and just called John’s bet. Why wouldn’t you raise it up right now? Why not raise it up, in case John had a calling hand, a hand like an overpair (which he had), or three eights?

Now the last card was the 10h (8s-7h-4h-8c-10h), and John checked, and now Anthony checked. What, Anthony checked again? Why in the world would you check when you hit your flush card? I mean, perhaps John would have folded for a bet here, but why not bet *something* here? After all, you do have a flush. Moreover, John hadn’t bet very much throughout the whole hand, and John had checked to him, which showed a lot of weakness. Thus, he should have bet at least 10,000 euros into this 16,000-euro pot. I guess Anthony was worried that John had him beat somehow.

Anthony's timid betting during this hand, particularly on the flop, cost him the tournament. If he had bet on the flop or raised it up on fourth street, then I believe John would have played with him, and Anthony would have won the tournament. Instead, Anthony won a minuscule pot, considering the hands that were out there, and from there John made a comeback and went on to win the WHUPC. Miami John is a great player, and he played a really nice game down the stretch, but I believe that Anthony should have won this event. Oh well, that's poker!

After growing in stature in 2002 and 2003, the WHUPC signed a major television contract in 2004, and switched venues to Barcelona, Spain (www.pokerineurope.com). I'm looking forward to seeing Spain for the first time. I'm also excited to hear that the poker games there are fantastic! Brand-new players are being introduced to Hold'em in Spain every day, although you'll probably find a lot of top European players there, too, enjoying the Spanish gold rush.

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Reading Other Players' Mail

On tap for this chapter: spectacular no-limit moves du jour. How could he make that raise? How could he make that call? How could he make that fold? Answer: he was reading your mail! He knew what cards you had, and then acted accordingly. I've often said, "If you know what the other players have when you're playing no-limit Hold'em, then you cannot lose." You may as well forget about your math and poker-strategy books, because these hands defy all of that. These moves were made on pure reading ability. Here, then, are a few of the more sensational moves that I've witnessed.

MANSOUR QUILTS STUEY FOREVER!

Back in 1992, at the World Series of Poker (WSOP), World Champions Mansour Matloubi and Stu Ungar faced off in a series of \$50,000

buy-in heads-up “freeze-outs” (one-on-one matches that ended when one player won \$50,000). Mansour told me he was at the top of his game at this point in his poker career, having just won the WSOP in 1990. The game they were playing that day was no-limit Hold’em, and the blinds were \$200–\$400 when the following hand came up.

Stuey opened for \$1,600 in the small blind, and Mansour called with 4-5 off suit. After a flop of 3-3-7 rainbow (no suits), Stuey bet \$6,000—he had started the hand with \$60,000 to Mansour’s \$40,000—and Mansour called the \$6,000 bet. On fourth street, a king came off, and both players checked. On the river, a queen came off, to make a board of 3-3-7-K-Q, and Mansour, smelling weakness in Stuey, bet his last \$32,000 or so. Stuey “looked right through” Mansour, and within ten seconds he said, “You have 4-5 or 5-6. I’m gonna call you with this.” Stuey then flipped up 10-9, and called the \$32,000 bet with merely a ten high! Wow, what an unbelievable call! Stuey couldn’t have beat even a jack-high bluff with his hand, never mind any pair. In fact, Stuey could have beaten only 4-5, 4-6, or 5-6 in this scenario.

Give Mansour some credit. He did read Stuey right and made a great bluff. But Stuey deserves even more credit! He not only read Mansour right, he then made an amazing call. After Stuey called, Mansour looked up at the ceiling and thought, “I feel like a bulldozer just ran over me. I still love Stuey, but what the heck is going on!” Mansour tells me now, “When a guy makes a call like that against you, you just give up. It’s like he’s taken all the wind out of your sails. I decided I couldn’t play him any more heads-up no-limit Hold’em, at least on that day, if not forever.” Indeed, it proved to be the last hand that Mansour ever played with Stuey heads-up (Stuey died in the late 1990s).

Another day at that WSOP in 1992, Stuey was playing in a five-handed \$600–\$1,200 game with Mansour on table 59, while Bobby Baldwin and “Chip” Reese were playing gin at table 60. All of a sudden, Chip turned to Stuey at the other table and said, “How did you like the way I played that hand?” Stuey, who again was busy playing

\$600–\$1,200 at the table next door, said, “I would have knocked four draws ago with five [points].” Chip then said, “Thanks,” and rolled his eyes back in his head.

Of course, Chip knew that Stuey was right, because Stuey was considered all but unbeatable in gin. In fact, he was so good at gin that for many years he couldn’t even get a game from anyone, anywhere. But Chip didn’t roll his eyes back in his head because Stuey was right. Rather, he rolled his eyes back because he couldn’t believe that Stuey was watching his every move while simultaneously playing high-stakes poker!



Stu Ungar (right) with Jack Binion after winning the 1997 WSOP.

In the 1980s, Stuey was considered the best in the world at gin (in fact, he was the best for two decades), the best no-limit Hold'em player ever (by then he had won two World Championships, with one more to come), and one of the best backgammon players in the world as well. To be at the top in any one of those games is quite a feat, but to be at or near the top in all three at once is truly unbelievable. There are many other wonderful stories about Stu and the incredible abilities he possessed. I've heard that there soon will be a book by Nolan Dalla about him, and that there is also a movie out titled *Stuey* that is based on his life. I'm looking forward to checking out both.

TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS AND DAVID CHIU

I believe that the Tournament of Champions (TOC) was close behind the World Series of Poker's main event in prestige in 1999 and 2000 (it had only been in existence for two years). What distinguishes the two for me is that when there were 45 players left in the TOC, I didn't even know 30 of them. This would never happen in the WSOP's main event. In the TOC, the game is limit, and unfortunately there is more luck in limit poker than there is in no-limit poker.

Be that as it may, I believe the TOC requires a tremendous amount of skill. I have never been given so much time to work my chips up in any other tournament, outside of the WSOP main event. I also loved the way that Mike Sexton and Chuck Humphrey had promoted the event, I do miss the TOC.

There were six players left at the Tournament of Champions in 1999 when the following hand came up. The blinds were \$10,000–\$20,000 and the antes were \$2,000 when Lynn Bauer limped in in the first position for \$20,000. Jan Boubli and Men Nguyen folded. Then David Chiu raised it up on the button, making it \$75,000 to go. (David had about \$850,000 in chips.) After only about 15 seconds, Louis Asmo literally pushed all of his chips, about \$650,000, into

the pot, and with high velocity at that. Doyle Brunson, in the big blind, folded his hand, and Lynn Bauer, in the first position, folded. After about a minute of studying, David Chiu flipped up two kings and said, "I fold."

Say what? ¿*Qué pasa?* Or as Ted Forrest likes to say, "What the heck is going on?" Louis then flipped up two aces, and the energy in the room erupted as the crowd realized they were watching a virtuoso performance. Yes, Louis had aces. But how did David know? This was undoubtedly the finest play made in a poker tournament in all of 1999. What happened?

What happened indeed! Louis Asmo knew that David had a hand because the tight-playing Lynn Bauer had limped into the pot in the first position. Why would David raise without a hand when a tight player limped in in the first position? (A lot of players like to trap from the first position.) David knew that Louis knew that he had a hand. It was also a given that Louis had a hand, since Louis plays incredibly tight. There was no way he would have raised someone that he knew had a big hand without having a big hand himself. All of this is easy to figure out. It is the next step, one that most people will never be able to take their entire lives, that is difficult: laying down pocket kings for a single reraise before the flop.

Now I know that Hamid Dastmalchi had laid down pocket kings before the flop at the final table of the WSOP the year that he became World Champion. But that was different. Difficult, yes, but Hamid had reraised Johnny Chan when Mike Alsaadi (read "supertight player") moved in over the top. According to Johnny Chan, Mike almost told Hamid what he had ("There is only one hand I'd move all-in with here"). So Hamid threw pocket kings away for the third raise (versus the second raise for David and Louis) from Mike Alsaadi. It is very rare, maybe once every other year, that someone will pocket kings before the flop in a tournament.

Anyway, David Chiu is either a Betazoid (like Counselor Troy on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) or he looked right through Louis and down into his soul. Don't get all religious on me now!

I just mean that sometimes we all know when we are up against the nuts. In fact, I was telling Andy Glazer the night before the finals that great players sometimes just know when their opponent has the nuts. I have thrown away two kings before the flop three times in my life, and all three times my opponent showed pocket aces. All those years of playing no-limit, and I have only thrown away kings thrice! Many of us have never thrown away kings before the flop in our lives.

David Chiu was able to throw away kings before the flop because he knew that Louis had the nuts (two aces). Maybe it had something to do with the fact that Louis moved his chips in at hyperspeed. Maybe David noticed that Louis was hoping for a call. Somehow David figured it all out under the most extreme conditions. Somehow David made a really great play. I have noticed that great players know when to make great plays. There is no doubt in my mind that David Chiu is a great player. David Chiu, I am proud of you. Take a bow.

THE POKER MILLION: A TALE OF FOUR BLUFFS

You say you were really unlucky in the last no-limit Hold'em tournament that you played in? You say you had bad cards and couldn't win a pot? John Duthie never had a hand, either, but somehow he managed to take the chip lead and then go on to win the Poker Million in 2000. How? you ask. How did he manage to win a no-limit Hold'em event without ever having a hand? You mean you actually thought that every time someone won a no-limit Hold'em event they were lucky?

Folks, wake up and smell the coffee. No-limit Hold'em is more about guts and reading ability than it is about luck. I have been telling everyone that I am a *really lucky player* for the last 10 years, and I genuinely believe that to be the case. But making that claim allows me to hide behind the fact that I have to make several key bluffs every time I win a no-limit Hold'em event. I wouldn't want

anyone to know that I actually bluff, now would I? Maybe people will start calling me down more often if they know I bluff. Also, it would sound pretty bad if I always said, "I stole every chip on the table today. Wow, was that easy." People like to focus on luck, and that's fine with me because those people will never be lucky enough to win a no-limit Hold'em event when there are some real players at the table. I would have been happy to go on pretending that I am just a lucky guy who never has to bluff, but John Duthie and the cameras under the table have ruined that strategy forever. John Duthie stole the Poker Million with his brilliant bluffs, and everyone knows it! How can a guy win if everyone is using the same bluffing strategy?

Was John Duthie just an amateur who was really lucky that he never ran into a real hand when he made his big bluffs? It's possible, but he did tell me after the Poker Million event that he had sensed his opponents were weak before he ever made a move at them. Sounds to me like a man who was reading his opponents perfectly. Regardless of whether you feel that he was lucky or just played perfectly, he did play almost perfectly.

It all started when John made a brilliant move against Tony Bloom. After John limped in with Q-J off suit in second position, Ian Dobson limped in behind him (we never saw his hand), and then Teddy Tuil called in the small blind. Tony Bloom made about a \$35,000 raise out of the big blind with K-2 off suit. John then made what I would ordinarily think was a bad call with his Q-J. After a flop of Ah-2c-3s, Tony led out for about \$50,000. John had only about \$160,000 in front of him. (Pot over, Tony wins, right?) Not exactly. Instead of folding, John Duthie decided to move all-in! If Tony had an ace, then John was drawing dead and out of the tournament. He moved all-in on a stone-cold bluff against a man who had raised pre-flop, and then led out when an ace hit the flop! Johnny Chan later told me, "What a great play he made. I mean, the man had no outs if he was called. I don't know if I could have made that play." I agree with you, Johnny, that is a nearly impossible play to make.

A little while later, Tony Bloom raised on the button and John Duthie called the raise with Q-J off suit in the big blind. The flop came K-8-2, and John checked. Now Tony bet out about \$50,000, and John raised him about \$100,000. Again, John was on a stone-cold bluff! At this point in the tournament, I was convinced that John had a strong read or a tell on Tony Bloom. I mean, two stone-cold bluffs in a 10-minute stretch against Tony—wow! John was certainly playing some strong poker so far. For those of you keeping track of the number of chips that John picked up bluffing so far, the total was now \$235,000 (\$35,000 TB + \$35,000 pot + \$50,000 TB + \$30,000 TB + \$35,000 pot + \$50,000 TB = \$235,000). Not a bad amount to pick up just by reading Tony Bloom well on two hands.

John “got busy” (European slang for bluffed) again when Ian Dobson opened the pot for \$35,000 with A-7 in the first position. Teddy Tuil then called on the button (they were four-handed at the time) with Qc-10c, and John called with Qh-9h in the big blind. The flop was J-6-2, and John checked, Ian bet \$50,000, and Teddy folded. Now I could see John begin to focus on Ian. While doing the commentary for this hand, I remarked that “it would be too good if John could make a bluff right here, especially in light of what he has already done.” Sure enough, John reached for \$100,000 and raised Ian’s \$50,000 bluff, about \$50,000 on a bluff of his own. I was stunned that he could make another perfect bluff! Ian folded quickly, and John stacked another \$170,000 (\$35,000 ID + \$35,000 TT + \$35,000 JD + \$15,000 pot + \$50,000 ID) of bluff money. It was almost as if John could see the other players’ hole cards, but I knew that they had done a security sweep for bugs of all sorts. The amount that John had picked up making those three beautiful bluffs was now \$405,000.

John’s fourth bluff occurred when John raised on the button with Q-5 and Teddy Tuil called in the big blind with K-9. The flop was A-9-5, Teddy led out for about \$25,000, and then John raised him about \$40,000. Teddy folded, and John had made another successful bluff.

In making four world-class bluffs, John picked up roughly

\$475,000! He had picked up 33 percent of the chips that were in play in this tournament by making four well-timed bluffs. He won it the way John Bonetti would have won it. First, he stole their money bluffing, then he put that bluff money to work with the worst hand and sucked out! Even if he hadn't sucked out, he always could have picked up some more bluff money and had a go at them again.

One amazing fact that the under-the-table cameras brought to light was this: the players didn't know what John Duthie was doing! Player after player (except Ian), said the same thing after they were eliminated: "John Duthie is playing really solid today!" Solid, my butt; he was playing the opposite of solid. John was playing more like—as Daniel Negreanu would say—a megalomaniac! Watching John Duthie reminded me that the best way to win a no-limit Hold'em tournament is without any cards! In fact, the best way to win a no-limit Hold'em tournament is with guts, heart, and a "strong right arm" (raising a ton and using your right arm as you do it).

Now, what were you saying about getting unlucky in that last no-limit Hold'em tournament that you played in? Oh right, you had some really bad cards late in the tournament and couldn't win a pot. Too bad—sounds like you were pretty unlucky to me. Maybe you'll have better "luck" next time.

SURVIVE AND THRIVE

If you want to win WSOP events, you need to know when to make big laydowns. "Survive and thrive" is an excellent theory. In fact, I tried to use this philosophy every day at the 2001 WSOP. I simply hung around and hung around until finally I picked up a couple of strong hands and won a couple of pots. Late on the second day of the main event at the 2001 WSOP, the following hand came up.

With the antes at \$50 per player and the blinds at \$200–\$400, Mike Magee, an excellent player from Ireland, raised the pot to \$1,200 to go in early position. I had A-6 off suit in the small blind, and decided to reraise the pot \$3,000. (By the way, I was definitely

on tilt at this point in the tournament! I had just moved from \$56,000 down to \$36,000 in the prior 20 minutes.) Mike decided to call the \$3,000 raise, and the flop came down As-10h-6h. What a flop for me! I bet out only \$3,500 to see what Mike would do. Much to my surprise, he raised me my last \$28,000! Shoot! What the heck was going on?

Wow! I went into “the tank” (I thought for a long time). After a minute or so, I started to believe that Mike had the Ah-Qh, which would give him a pair of aces with a flush draw. If he did have Ah-Qh or Ah-Kh, then I would still be about a 3-to-2 favorite. But what if he had 10-10 in the hole, which would give him trip tens, or A-10 in the hole, for aces and tens? If he had trip tens, or aces and tens (A-10 in the hole), then I would be drawing to just two cards in the deck to win, and I’d be roughly a 10-to-1 underdog. Can I imagine being a 10-to-1 underdog for all of my remaining chips at the World Championships of Poker? Yuck, now that’s ugly!

After a while, I decided that Mike had me beat. I showed my hand to the table and folded it, provoking a lot of gasps from the players around the table. I am very proud of this laydown. I then said to Mike, “Nice hand.” Mike then told me, “Phil, I didn’t know you had two giant-size ones. Because you’ve handled yourself so well, I’m going to tell you what I had. I had the ace-ten of clubs.” Mike was so genuine that I believed him! I had made a great laydown, and I would have almost certainly gone broke had I called Mike Magee here. Instead, a great laydown had kept me alive in the WSOP. What a great feeling! Mike then proceeded to tell me, “Phil, believe it or not, I actually had you on A-6 in this hand, and that’s why I moved all-in. I knew that you had to call me.”

After I folded this hand, I went on to run my chips up to about \$60,000 or so by the end of day two. By the end of day four, I had over a million dollars in chips, and had taken the lead at the WSOP. Eventually I settled for a bitterly disappointing fifth place, but drew \$300,000 in prize money. All because I had made a great laydown against Mike Magee. “Survive and thrive!”

MY GREAT FOLD, THEN A BIG BLUNDER

The Los Angeles Poker Classic at the Commerce Casino was one of the best events of 2002. The first event, a limit Hold'em \$300 buy-in with rebuys, had a first-place payout of over \$160,000. Now that's starting out with a bang! Many of the \$300 and \$500 buy-in events had a first-place payout of more than \$40,000, and when the \$1,500 buy-in with rebuys event began, that guaranteed \$1 million in prize money.

Austin Powers was laughed at and told by number two that "one million dollars" isn't much money, but even the highest-stakes players in the world were licking their chops over the possibility of winning \$570,000 for first place in this glorious event! I applaud the Commerce Casino for putting together such a well-designed tournament. I hope they continue to run this event every year. Yes, a player from Palo Alto did win the \$570,000 first prize, but it wasn't me! It was Diego Cordovez, and he didn't even consider making a deal. Nice job, Diego!

I flew into Los Angeles on Wednesday, February 6, 2002, to warm up with a \$300 buy-in pot-limit Hold'em event. I was feeling pretty good about my play, since I had finished in the money in three of the last five tournaments I had played in, down in Tunica. As the tournament moved along and I made it into the money, the players were all joking, "Here comes Phil, he pops into town and knocks off the first event he plays in!" Not exactly. When we hit the final two tables, Steve "Country" Riehle (who had been at the final table with me at the World Series of Poker 2001) was playing very aggressively. I noted this and told myself, "He's going to go through some chips playing that fast. I'll just sit back and pick him off when I have a hand." So much for planning your tactics.

When we were down to five at each table, the following hand came up between Country and me. I had just witnessed him go all-in with A-6 against his opponent's K-K, and he made a straight and aces (5-7-8-9-A!) to win that pot. With the blinds at \$800-\$1,600, Country opened for the maximum of \$5,600 in first position. I had 10-10 in second position, and I was getting ready to move my \$16,000

all-in. I was studying Country when I suddenly thought, “Wow, somehow I know he has Q-Q or better this hand. With that read, I must fold my hand right now.” To me, this would be a world-class laydown, throwing away 10-10 five-handed against a guy who’s raising every hand, for a single pre-flop raise. Anyway, I went with my gut and threw my hand away. Country then showed K-K, and I jumped out of my seat, pumping my fist and shouting, “That’s how you play poker, baby! Throw away 10-10 when you know it’s no good!” I showed the pocket tens to everyone at the table, and thought, “This is my tournament to win right now.” Sure, sure. I made a bonehead play merely three hands later that left me shaking my head in disgust.

With a second-place chip position of \$16,000, I was a strong favorite to make it down to the final three. All I had to do was stay with the safe style that I had played all day long. Just wait for others to make mistakes, and then pounce like a lion on their chip stacks. Only once all day did I move all-in on someone, and I had Q-Q that time. I was sitting in the small blind, and Country raised it to \$5,600 to go on the button (he raised the max again). I looked down at Kc-Jc, and started to ponder what to do. Normally, I would throw this hand away, but Country was playing so aggressively that I was considering moving all-in with it. After much deliberation, I thought, “OK, Country has A-10, and he can’t call me if I move all-in.” So I announced, “I’m all-in!” After the big blind folded, Country jumped out of his seat (never a good sign!) and said, “I got him! I have two aces, Phil.”

What in the world was I thinking? I never risk all of my chips on a bluff or a semi-bluff. I always sit back and wait for people to give their chips to me when they overplay their hands. This time it was I who was overplaying my hand! I couldn’t believe I’d made such a bad play. No one to blame but myself. Was I unlucky that Country had survived ten hands earlier with his A-6 against the opponent’s K-K? Was I unlucky that Country picked up K-K when I had 10-10, and then picked up A-A against my Kc-Jc on the button when I was in the small blind? No, it was entirely my fault; all I had to do was

throw away Kc-Jc for \$5,600. All I had to do was wait and move my chips the way I've learned to move them over the years. All I had to do was wait—for either the first-place trophy or a bad-beat story.

I should at least come up with a good bad-beat story when I'm eliminated from a tournament. Maybe this time it would have been "Boys, I took A-K all-in against Country's A-Q and he hit a queen." Or perhaps I would have left that night with a first-place trophy!

"BOYS, LET'S PLAY SOME POKER!"

At the \$5,000 buy-in Hall of Fame No-Limit Hold'em Championship event in 2002, my starting table had Erik Seidel, Howard Lederer, Daniel Negreanu, and Chris Bjorin. Of course, the whole tournament was tough, with only 50-some players playing that day, most of whom were top name players.

With the blinds at \$50–\$100, the following hand came up. I limped under the gun (I called \$100 as first player to act) with Kh-8h, and Howard called right behind me, and then a couple of other players called as well. The flop came down Kd-8d-3h, and I was thinking, "Yippee, I have the top two pair!" I bet out \$400, and Howard called me; then another player moved all-in for \$775 total. When the other two players in the pot folded, I quickly decided two things: first, I wasn't sure that I could legally raise, since my bet was \$400 and the raise was only \$375 more, but I thought I could; second, I didn't want to ask if I could raise and let Howard know the real strength of my hand. So immediately, when it was my turn to act, I just called the \$375 raise, trying to look weak and disinterested in the pot. I wanted it to look as if I had top pair with a weak kicker or second pair, like K-6 suited or A-8 or the like. In fact, I would have called \$375 more with any pair or any reasonable hand, and I knew that Howard knew this was the case. I wanted Howard to raise it up with his hand, so that I could move all-in and win a big pot. My quick, nonchalant call had set a trap perfectly for Howard to fall into.

Howard now asked if he could raise—I continued to look disinterested in the transpiring events—and Erik said, “Yes, you can raise, since the raise was over one-half of the original bet.” I was thinking, “Please raise it, please raise it.” Howard now announced, “I raise,” and he began fiddling with his chips. Now I began drooling: Howard would raise, and I would move in and bust him! After about 30 seconds, which is a long time in the poker world, Howard announced, “I’m all-in for \$7,300 more.” I quickly counted my chips with the intent of calling his bet immediately, when I suddenly thought, “No need to rush here, let me study Howard for a moment.”

Now I knew that I couldn’t fold the top two pair here, no way, but what if Howard had 3-3 in the hole or 8-8? Then I would have only a few outs; I would need a king if Howard had, say, 8-8 as his hole cards (I would be a huge underdog). The more I focused on Howard, the more I began to fear that he had exactly a set of threes. Intuitively, I read superstrength when I studied him! Logically, Howard doesn’t usually play K-x hands, especially after I limp in, in the first position. Thus, I didn’t think he had two pair like K-3. Then I remembered that Howard had thought about raising the pot before the flop, which made me think that he did have 3-3, or 8-8, or even A-A.

So I started to talk, to send out the message that I did indeed have the top two pair (I couldn’t flip my hand up like I could have in the good old days, or even tell him that that’s what I had, or I could be penalized). How would Howard react to this news of me being strong? As I (legally) announced that I was superstrong, Howard said to me, “What, do you have, Ad-3d?” I didn’t like this question at all, and responded, “That’s what I thought you had.” His look right then struck me. Now I became convinced that Howard didn’t have the Ad-3d (the one hand that it was easiest to assign to him here), and that one statement by him convinced me that I needed to fold my top two pair. You see, I knew Howard was superstrong from my read, so by letting him know that I had a superstrong hand (through my talking) I was able to determine that he did indeed

want to be called (he didn't show any fear). If Howard hadn't said anything to me, I probably would have had to call him with my top two pair. I had even mentioned to Howard earlier that I was reading everyone at the table well, except him. So now it was time to fold, but it took me a while to convince myself that this absurd laydown could actually be right. I can't be certain, but it's possible that I have never before folded the top two pair in my life with a nonsuited or nonstraightening flop.

Howard could still have had A-A, A-K, K-Q, or the Ad-3d (although I ruled this hand out when he began to talk), but I was reading that he was extremely strong. Finally—Daniel said it took me more than five minutes (sorry, table!)—I threw the hand away faceup, saying, "I fold."

Chris Bjorin then said out loud to the table, "That is the worst laydown I have ever seen in my entire life." Whereupon Howard flipped up 3-3, and Chris did a double take! In fact, Chris later said it was one of the *best* laydowns he had ever seen in his life. This was probably one of the three best laydowns that I've ever made, in all these years of playing No-Limit Hold'em. Of course, a player or two at the table said they would have thrown away my hand as well; yeah, right! Now the next two cards were turned, and the all-in man won the pot with 3d-4d, when he made a flush to beat Howard's trips.

The elation I felt at that moment was powerful! I felt as light as a feather and jumped out of my seat and ran away from the table, saying, "Boys, let's play some poker!" I was supposed to lose over 95 percent of my chips that hand, but didn't. I had got out of the trap! After a minute, I realized that there was still a long way to go, and that celebrating early wasn't going to help my game any. If I didn't win the tournament, then all that that hand would be was a nice story.

Three hands later, another player with \$2,500 called \$100 under the gun, and I studied him with my 9-9 on the button, and then decided to just call the \$100. Usually, I would move in a small stack

with my pocket 9-9, but something didn't smell right. An ace flopped, and after I checked down to him the whole way, he showed me K-K. Another reason to dance: \$2,300 more saved! That made \$10,000 saved in three hands. Yes, my reads were dead-on, but since I didn't win the tourney or even make the final table, here it is, just another nice story to tell.

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From the Other Side of the Table

The stories in this chapter were contributed by many of my poker friends and fellow players, though in some cases I have slightly tweaked the telling. I am proud that these guest authors have offered their unique, insightful views of how and why certain poker hands were played the way they were. From all-time poker greats like nine-time World Series of Poker winners Doyle “Texas Dolly” Brunson and Johnny “The Oriental Express” Chan, to well-known players Ted Forrest, Jennifer Harman, Annie Duke, John “Bono” Bonetti, Layne Flack, Howard Lederer, Daniel Negreanu, Peter “The Poet” Costa, Men “The Master” Nguyen, Richard Tatalovich, Andy Glazer, and “Miami” John Cernuto, to the most celebrated poker tournament director of our time, Jack McClelland, you have here a great selection for your enjoyment and enlightenment. Everyone ought to enjoy these hands, because these folks know their poker!

DOYLE “TEXAS DOLLY” BRUNSON’S “MATH”

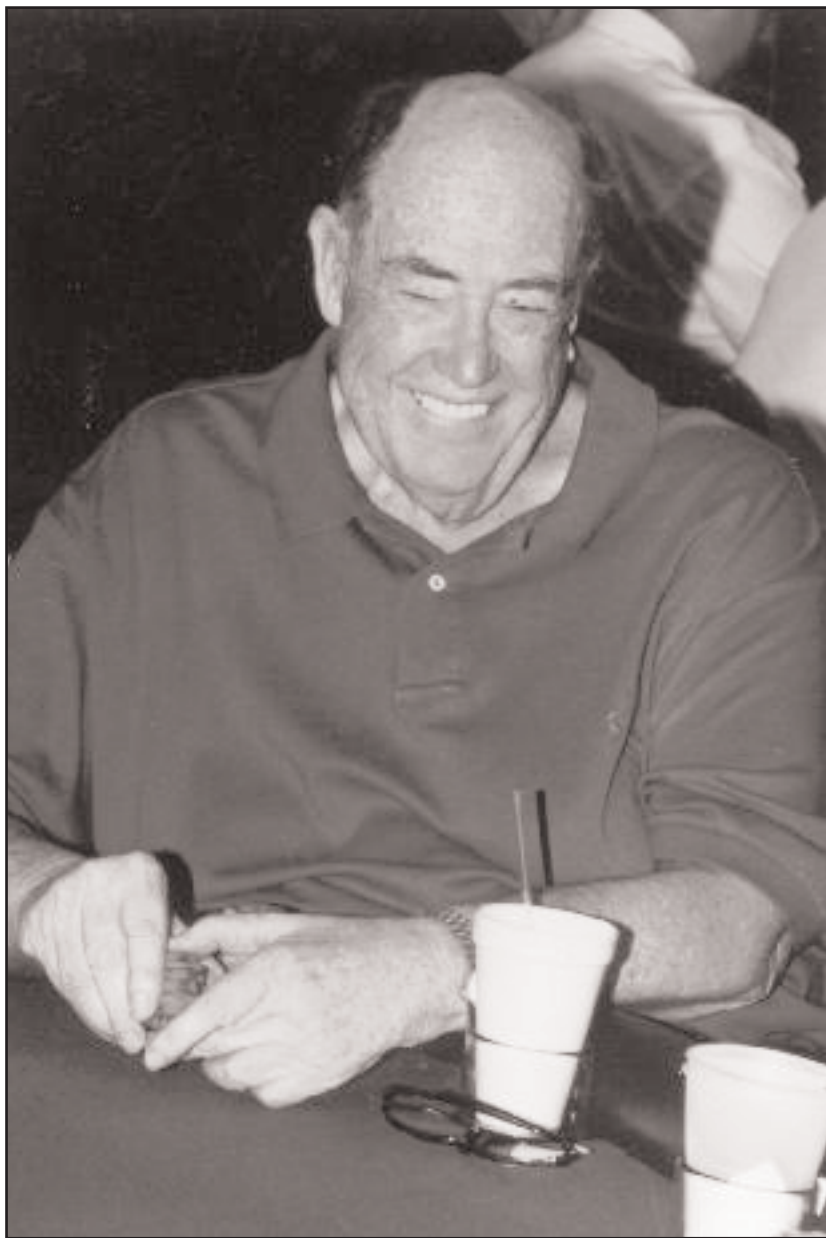
Over the last 44 years of playing professionally, it’s hard to single out any particular hand as being the most unusual. I think of the two royal flushes I made playing No-Limit Hold’em, both times against World Champion Bobby Baldwin, beating four jacks once and aces full the other time. Another time, Chip Reese beat my quads twice in the same night!

But the hand I remember most was against David Sklansky, in the World Series of Poker in 1974. We were heads-up in the finals of the Seven-Card Stud Hi-Lo Split no-qualifier, and had about the same amount of money. We got involved in a pot where I had A-2-5-8 in four and David had 4-5-7-8. We went to war and raised each other until we were both all-in. I was laughing to myself at his mistake: I had the best high and the best low! David busted out; I caught good and scooped the pot, and claimed the championship.

It wasn’t until the next week, when a magazine that David was writing for came out, that I learned what David was thinking. He was talking about this final hand, and he had down in his article our first four cards. Then he said, “I knew at that moment that I knew more about the game than Doyle.” He then went on to prove mathematically that his hand would scoop mine more times than mine would scoop his. Where was Poker Probe (Poker Probe is software that allows you to compare hands and determine which hand is the favorite to win, and by how much) when I needed it? It was also my introduction into the world of math in poker. I realized that I had better sharpen up if I was to survive in the poker world. That hand has always stayed with me. I’ll bet David remembers it well also. I remember the neat way he closed his article in the magazine: “But Doyle wasn’t giving any refunds.”

JOHNNY CHAN’S MIDDLE PAIR

The following hand came up between Kevin Song and me in the LA Poker Classic’s \$2,500 buy-in no-limit Hold’em championship



Doyle Brunson lighting up the room with his smile.

event at the Commerce Casino in 1999. We had started the day with more than 100 players, and first place was \$98,000 plus change. There were about 16 players left, the blinds were \$800–\$1,600, and the ante was \$200 per player.

So in this hand, a player under the gun moved all-in for \$3,400 with 7d-6d. I looked down at pocket eights on the button and made it \$10,000 to go. Then Kevin, a well-known player, hesitated for a while with pocket sevens in the big blind. He looked at me . . . and I looked at him . . . then he looked at the all-in man, and I tried to read his mind. I was guessing that he was thinking, “Can I steal some dead money here by moving all-in?” After a minute or so, Kevin said, “I’m all-in.” I wanted to double-check, since he didn’t physically move his chips in, so I asked, “Are you all-in, Kevin?” He said, “Yes, I’m all-in.” Then I asked him, “How much is it?” We determined that he had about \$32,000, and I had about \$33,000 total. I pondered for a while, thinking, “Jesus Christ, he must have me beat.”

As I was thinking, I remembered what had happened three hands before. I had had a straight draw on fourth street and had bet it out into him. He had called me. On the river, I had given up on the pot and had checked my jack-high nothing to him. Now Kevin had bet out \$2,500 into the \$10,000 pot. I have played a lot with Kevin Song in tournaments, and I had never seen him bet out \$2,500 before. So I said to myself, “Yum, yum.” Then I said, “Here, I raise you \$10,000 more.” He didn’t hesitate. He just “zoop” (threw his hand away). Then I showed him that I had bluffed him with jack high, and oh boy, you could see the smoke coming out of his ears!

So here we are, now, in the current hand where I have pocket eights. I started to sort out the possibilities in my mind. If I folded the hand, then I would have only \$23,000 in chips, and it would be a lot of work to make the final three money spots. If I called and won the pot, then I felt that the almost \$70,000 I would end up with would make me a big favorite to make the final three. I thought that Kevin had either a big pair, a small pair, an A-K, or an A-rag. I figured that out of those four possibilities, I was in good shape in three of them.



Johnny Chan, cool as the other side of the pillow.

Finally, I just felt that I had Kevin beat. I thought that maybe he was trying to make a play at me because I had just made one at him. So I said, “Well, let’s go baby, I move all-in.” When I put my chips in, Kevin couldn’t believe it. He was the first to show his hand, but he didn’t want to turn his hand over. Being that it wasn’t the final table—the 2002 “must show your hand when you’re all-in rule” hadn’t taken effect yet—he didn’t have to turn his hand over yet.

So the flop was Q-10-3, then a deuce, and then a ten, for a final board of Q-10-3-2-10. The first gentleman said, “I guess I can’t win this pot with seven high.” Kevin looked at me, but of course I’m in last position and therefore last to show my hand. I just wanted to see what Kevin had, and finally he said, “Two pair.” I said, “I have two pair.” Then Kevin said, “Two small pair.” When he said two small pair, man, my heart just said, “Wow, how sweet this is.” Then he showed two sevens. I said, “This is two pair,” as I showed him my two eights.

After that pot, I remained in the driver’s seat and ended up winning the tournament at about 9:00 A.M. By the way, the tournament had started at 2:30 P.M. on Saturday, so it was a long way home to win this event.

It was particularly sweet for me to win that big pot from Kevin after what he did to me in the Bicycle Club’s Legends of Poker final event in late August 1998. First place in the Legends championship event was over \$100,000, and I had a \$5,000 “second-place only” and a \$10,000 “first-place only” bet against Phil Hellmuth.

I twice played huge pots with Kevin with three players left, where I had way the best of it, but Kevin won both pots. Once, we moved all-in before the flop with my A-Q to his A-J, and the flop was Q-3-6, only to have the ten and then the king hit on the next two cards to bust me. In that event, I wound up finishing in third place.

I noticed that the *Card Player* magazine published a picture of Kevin Song with my name written under it in 1999. That’s how lucky he is: he got to use my name for a week!

Phil's two cents: T. J. Cloutier once told me, "Sometimes you need to make a stand with a middle pair like pocket eights." As usual, Chan's timing was perfect when he made his stand. Johnny, I'll see you at the final table soon!

ANNIE DUKE'S HAND

During the 1999 WSOP, I split the \$5,000 limit Hold'em tournament with Eli Balas. At the final table, I played an interesting hand with Ali Sharkasheik, a good pot-limit Omaha player from London. The hand was not interesting for its effect on my chip position, since few chips were won or lost, and neither of us was eliminated or crippled because of the hand. Rather, the hand is interesting because it nicely illustrates some mistakes that can be made at the final table, and how by too strongly patterning your play you can allow players to play well against you.

I had started the day third in chips with \$73,500. Ali had started with about the same amount, at \$75,000 in chips. While Ali was making the most of a lot of big hands during the day and building himself up to over \$100,000 in chips, I was completely card dead and unable to maneuver much, and found myself reduced to about \$45,000 in chips when this hand occurred. We were down to six players, and I was on the button. The level was \$3,000–\$6,000, putting me well low on chips. I had been playing with Ali since late the night before, when he drew my table for the last 18 players. He had been playing extremely tight, just calling with big pairs. I saw him reraise only once, against a button raise when he had a relatively weak A-9. Earlier, I had raised his big blind from an early position, and he had shown me A-J and folded. From this, I knew that Ali was in a "snug" mood, to say the least.

I was on the button, Mickey Appleman was in the small blind, and Ali was in the big blind. Everyone else folded to me, and I raised my button with Q-J off suit. Mickey folded and Ali called. Right



Annie Duke at the WSOP.

away, I knew I had to play with caution. Ali definitely had a better hand than I did. I felt that he would reraise with a random ace, fold most K-x hands, and call with anything better than that. This meant that I was looking at a pair or a strong ace. So I decided to play with extreme caution after the flop.

The flop came down K-10-x. A great flop for my hand, considering that I missed. Ali checked, and I bet—hoping he would fold a miss in case he had a bad ace or an underpair nines or lower. But he called. Once he called, I knew he had to have me crushed, and from how he was acting I expected at least A-K. The turn came nothing. He checked, and I checked. The river came nothing. He checked, and I checked. He then turned over A-A and won the rather small pot.

In my opinion, Ali misplayed his hand—I think because he is primarily a pot-limit player rather than a limit player. Let's look at the play on each street. I like my raise before the flop, a lot. Mickey was short on chips and would not defend his small blind without a very strong hand. And although Ali had a lot of chips, he was playing very tight, so I was likely to pick up the pot right there.

So what about Ali's flat call before the flop? I think this is a much better play in pot limit, where you can trap someone for all their chips on later betting rounds, than it is in limit—particularly when you're playing against someone short on chips whom you can cripple. If he reraises, I almost always have to call, since at that point I am getting 5.5-to-1 odds on my money. He can guarantee himself at least one more small bet with a reraise, and because he is reraising out of the big blind against an aggressive button raise, he is not really announcing his hand. In fact, the way he had been playing, I would have put him on a weaker hand with that play, and might have played very aggressively had I flopped a queen. Nonetheless, I think his flat call before the flop really was a legitimate option here, since it does, normally, give your hand some mystery.

On the flop, Ali checked, and I bet, with my Q-J off suit, and Ali just called. As I said, I bet hoping that he would lay down a pair smaller than nines. By the way, by betting here on the flop, I think there was a small possibility of winning the pot (by having Ali fold)

against Ali's Q-Q or J-J or at least A-10, A-J, or A-Q right there—considering how snug he had been playing. His flat call on the flop (after his check and my bet) was, I think, a mistake. He should have check-raised here. If I missed the flop, he would have to count on me betting on the turn if he was to make any more money, and I hadn't been doing that all day. But if I hit the flop, and he check-raised, I would definitely call. Unless I had him beat, I wouldn't reraise, because of how snug he had been playing—and he probably knew that. But against any K-x, A-10, A-J, A-Q, or Q-J, he would get a call. He would only get reraised by A-A, K-K, 10-10, or K-10. Because it is so unlikely that I would bet on the turn, unless I have exactly a good king, the best way for him to guarantee more money here would be to check-raise.

On the turn he checked again. I don't like this play either. As I said, I had been checking the turn all day. So he had to hope that I had hit my hand hard in order to get a bet out of me. In my opinion, he would be just giving up a free card to me, under most circumstances, and unless I have completely missed the flop this would be very dangerous for him, since he wouldn't know where he stood when any scary card came on the river—particularly that disastrous card, a third ace giving him trips and me a straight. And a bet might have won the pot right there if my hand had been weak, like A-10, A-J, or A-Q. Further, against a strong draw, like Q-J, he would have won an extra \$6,000 when I missed, since I would call. What's more, he would have charged me some bets to draw.

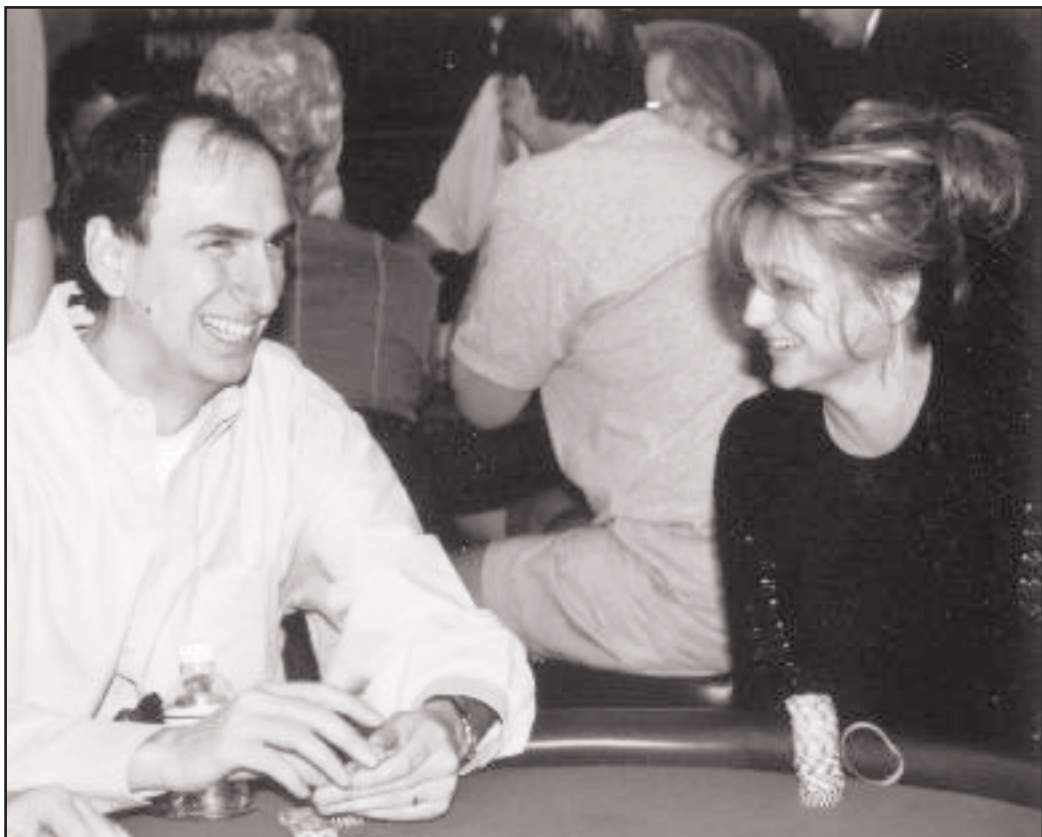
On the river, Ali checked again. I think this was the worst of the plays, since by now he had to know that I couldn't have a hand that would beat him. Especially considering that a blank card had hit on the river. Ali was essentially risking nothing with his bet in order to win \$6,000—sounds like good odds to me. I think he was hoping I would bluff the river, but again, I had not been playing that way all day. And the probability of my bluffing was surely a lot more remote than the probability of my calling with a weaker hand, like K-x or A-10 or Q-Q or J-J—all hands that would have had me check on the turn against him.

Ali played the hand with a pot-limit style—slow-playing and trying to trap me. But it seems to me that in limit poker—particularly when you’re down to six players and playing against someone whom you have well outchipped and can cripple—it’s always better to try to win as many chips as you can on every street. As it turned out, I lost \$9,000 on a hand I should have lost \$18,000 on. Likewise, Ali won \$10,500 on a hand he should have won \$19,500 on. Since I later got down to \$12,000 at the \$6,000–\$12,000 level, I believe that the \$9,000 I saved was absolutely critical to my eventually splitting the tournament with Eli Balas. Which just goes to show that sometimes a seemingly insignificant hand can have a crucial bearing on what happens later at the final table.

JENNIFER HARMAN’S TOUGH DECISION

The World Poker Tour, founded in 2003, has come to enjoy huge popularity, and its prize pools have kept pace with its growth. The tour has certainly gained my interest, and I’ve started playing in a few of the events. Normally, I play cash games at the Bellagio and find that tournaments are just too draining, as well as frustrating! I wouldn’t consider no-limit Hold’em to be my best game by any means, but I’ve spent a lot of time recently working on my game, and my confidence has been growing.

Coming into this event at the Borgata, in Atlantic City, I had high expectations. I felt that I was playing well, and that if I could catch a lucky break here and there I’d have a legitimate chance to win it. Well, with just seven players left I was cruising right along and could just taste victory. Then I was faced with an interesting hand that I’ll probably be second-guessing for years to come: with blinds at \$10,000–\$15,000 with a \$2,000 ante, I was sitting in pretty good shape with \$300,000 in chips. The others all folded to me, and I was on the button with Ah-10c. I decided to raise it, making it \$45,000 to go. The big blind, a tricky player named Charles Shoten, aka “Scotty Warbucks,” called the raise. Charlie had more chips



Erik Seidel shares a laugh with Jennifer Harman.

than I did, so it was important that I observe some caution against such a skilled and cunning player. The flop came Kh-Qh-10h. “Wow, that was a pretty sweet flop for my hand,” I thought. A pair of tens and a royal flush draw! Charlie checked, and I bet \$80,000, which was close to three-quarters of the pot size. Charlie called. The turn brought the 10s. Wow, this hand just keeps getting better and better. Now Charlie again checked, and I decided to check also (more on that later). The river brought the 9c. Oh, what an ugly card. For me, that had to be the single worst card that could have come on the river. Charlie bet out just \$40,000, and with so much money in the pot I decided to call it. Charlie turned over two red nines for a full house, nines over tens.

So what happened here? Why did I check the turn? Why did I pay him off on the river? Well, here was my thinking: knowing how tricky Charlie was, I thought there was a reasonable chance that he'd flopped a straight (with a hand of J-9 or A-J) or even possibly a flush of some kind. In fact, I also didn't rule out the possibility that Charlie was trapping me with a set of K-K or Q-Q, which would have given him a full house. Couple that with the fact that if I did in fact have the best hand, there would be very few outs against me. I had the straight covered with my ace if a jack hit, and that same ace was also protecting me from any heart that might come on the river. Of course, if Charlie had had a jack in his hand, for an open-ended straight draw, an ace would have made him the straight, but it would have made me a full house. There was also a decent chance that Charlie was drawing completely dead against my hand. At best, he could have had a total of five outs (provided I had the best hand, of course). If he'd had a hand like K-J, for example, he would have had three nines and two kings to beat me for a total of five outs. Now, that's the worst-case scenario. As it turned out, my check on the turn gave Charlie two free outs, and it was my bad luck to lose this pot.

It kept me thinking, though, how off was my thought process here? Was there any real merit to the check? Should I have just protected my hand, since it was a tournament, and bet big on the turn? I had a lot of questions, so I asked several players whose game I respect, and got very different answers. Phil Ivey: "I would have moved all-in on the turn. It's a tournament, and I want what's in the middle. I don't want to give my opponents any free cards to beat me." Daniel Negreanu: "Considering your read of Charlie, I liked the check on the turn. You were only going to get called when you were beat, and the worst thing that could have happened is you give him a free shot when he is drawing real slim anyway." It wasn't till I talked to a legend, arguably the best poker player who has ever walked this earth, that the right answer dawned on me. Phil, Daniel, and I were all preoccupied with the wrong potential error.

Here is what David "Chip" Reese had to say: "I would have avoided the whole dilemma by moving all-in on the flop. If you bet

the \$80,000 and get raised, you are going to call anyway, so why not just move all-in first? That way, you might even get your opponent to lay down the best hand as well.” Duh! It seems so obvious to me now, but at the time it never dawned on me. Thanks, Chip!

As to my call on the river, the pot was laying me such a big price when Charlie bet just \$40,000 that I felt I just had to call. There was over \$250,000 in the pot, so I was being laid well over 6-to-1 odds that Charlie was either (a) bluffing or (b) making a smallish bet with what he felt might be the best hand (possibly A-K or even 10-8).

I hope you’ve all enjoyed reading about this hand. I’ll tell you what, though; I sure didn’t enjoy the way it played out.

TED FORREST’S AMAZING ANALYSIS

This hand took place at the Bellagio poker room, in Las Vegas, in a mixed game—half \$1,000–\$2,000 Seven-Card Stud Eight or Better (S 8B), half \$1,000-per-point Chinese Poker. Ming Ly, Mitch, Chau Giang, and I had been playing four-handed for the better part of two days.

The Stud Eight or Better has a \$200 ante, with the low card forced to open for \$300. The third-street raise completed the bet to \$1,000, with the betting being set at \$1,000 and \$2,000 after that. Ming brought it in low with the 8c (\$300), and Chau then raised the bet to \$1,000, showing the Ah. I called with the 10c in the door and the 10s and 7s in the hole. Mitch folded the Kd, and Ming called the \$700 more. On fourth street, Chau showed Ah-7h and bet out. Now showing 10c and 9s, I called. Ming called behind me with 8c and 6h.

At this point, I felt that Chau’s most likely hand was four to a seven low. I was less sure about Ming’s hand, but he probably had a pair and three babies (three low cards eight or below) or four cards to an eight-low draw. On fifth street, Chau caught the 7c, which gave him open sevens (Ah-7h-7c), which he bet. I caught the 8h, and Ming caught a king. My board showed 10-9-8 rainbow (no suits), and I raised the bet to \$4,000 with tens and an open-ended straight draw. Ming folded his hand (which I liked), and Chau called the raise.



Ted Forrest at the final table of the 2003 WPT \$25,000 Buy-in Championship.

At this point, I was almost certain that Chau's hand was a pair of sevens and four to a seven low. I was also confident that he did not have a four flush, because he surely would have reraised me with that hand. On sixth street, Chau caught the Jc while I caught a useless king (I was wishing we could have exchanged our sixth-street cards). Chau checked and called my bet.

When I did not improve my hand on sixth street and opted to bet anyway, I already knew what I would do on the river. If Chau were to check to me, I would bet if I made a straight or three tens, even if I ended up with only a pair of tens. I would check two pair, because I thought that he would not call with a lower two pair, and I would call only if Chau beat my hand. If he were to bet on the end, then I would raise with a straight, three tens, and a pair of tens. I would also raise with two pair, because even though Chau would have most likely checked and called with a hand that beat tens up, there would be a reasonable chance that if he had chosen to bet, say, aces up and was raised on the end, he might have chosen to fold this type of a hand often enough to justify the risk of the raise. In other words, by raising on the end with two pair of tens up, I might force Chau to fold a better hand like aces up. (Remember that a raise risks only one bet rather than two bets, because I must call his bet anyway, since he may be betting a low).

Chau looked at his last card, studied, and then bet. He had made either a low hand or some type of high hand that beat tens up—he would not bet two small pair in this spot. Well, according to my earlier thinking in the hand, I could just raise him dark, but I didn't want to risk getting a reflex call from aces up or trip sevens.

I am relatively sure that he was drawing dead to beat three tens or a straight, so I would have raised for value with these hands. If he had reraised me, I would really have been shocked later were he to show me a high hand. So if I did get reraised I would have an easy call—even with only two tens. I looked at my last card, which was the useless 3h. Useless to me, but at least it made a heart flush even less likely for Chau.

In for a penny, in for a pound. I went ahead and raised. Then

Chau stood up out of his chair and looked at my board. I noticed he had a sick look on his face. Chau started analyzing the play of the hand out loud. We were all tired, and he was taking a long time making his decision. At this point, I know that he had made some type of a high hand, and I was thinking that the worst his hand could be was jacks up.

I felt OK for about the first 20 seconds of Chau's pondering, but then I started thinking about the fact that there was about \$25,000 out there and I had two tens—my hand couldn't possibly be good. Chau had jacks up, aces up, or even three sevens, and it was only \$2,000 for him to look me up. I was really hoping he had the jacks up. Even though all three holdings were essentially the same against my hand, it just seemed like it was psychologically easier to lay down jacks up than to lay down the other two hands.

I could feel Chau replaying the hand and counting the pot and realizing that the pot was laying him over 12-to-1 odds on a \$2,000 call. I didn't know that I would have called myself in this spot, since the odds could well be more than 12 to 1 that I had a pat hand in this situation. Chau had been thinking for probably only about 50 seconds, although to me it seemed more like 3 minutes. I was really starting to sweat it when Ming inadvertently came to my rescue by suggesting to Mitch that we change the game to just Chinese Poker. Mitch was an expert Chinese Poker player and would likely have welcomed the change.

What a wonderful opportunity for me to appear unconcerned with my hand and the \$25,000 sitting in the middle of the table. I began arguing that we had been playing both games all day and all night, and that we were not going to change now. I am considered something of a sucker at Chinese Poker, and it may well be true, so it was very natural for me to insist that we not change the game. I think my concern and my attention toward not changing the game to Chinese Poker was enough to convince Chau that I had to have him beat and, much to my relief, his cards sailed into the muck.

Let's dissect this hand a bit. I think my third-street call with a pair of tens was somewhat bad, considering that Chau Giang raised

with an ace, although the suited seven with the tens helped a bit. Chau would generally raise with all but his worst hands in this spot, but my hand was still oftentimes in bad shape. I would have hated it if Mitch had called with his king behind me, and I would have looked to end the hand without immediate improvement. On third street, I made what was likely a bad call. You see, Chau had picked up his cards in a comfortable, relaxed fashion. This suggested to me that he had a legitimate hand that he was comfortable with, such as three babies. I think that if he had aces or a pocket pair, Chau would have been more guarded about his hand.

Generally, it is a mistake to lock yourself into putting your opponent on one type of hand and then marrying yourself to that read. But in this case, I liked it that I did that. I was as sure as I could be that Chau had three babies.

On fourth street, Chau's bet, my call with tens and a three to a straight flush, and Ming's call with 8-6 showing were all natural. Chau's bet on fifth street, showing Ah-7h-7c, is natural. I like my raise with tens and an open-ended straight draw, which included the 7s. I probably had the best high hand, plus a draw to a big hand. Getting rid of Ming (with the raise), if he had three to a low and a pair, made it more likely for me to scoop the pot. And there was also some chance that I could cause a bad low draw to fold, which would be very profitable for my hand.

On sixth street, I had an important decision. I was not a big favorite over sevens and a low draw that also contained an ace and a jack. There was also some chance that I was beaten already—although I felt confident that the tens were good. It would be reasonable to check on sixth street, but I believe that after raising on fifth street, it was better to bet. By betting, you are very likely to eliminate the possibility of a call from two small pair on the end.

In my opinion, my raise on the river was a good decision. The pot was laying me more than 11-to-1 odds (\$22,800 to \$2,000) on my raise. (Remember, I would have to call anyway, because Chau might have been betting a low, and a raise would risk only one bet, not two, if my analysis of the hand was correct and Chau couldn't

make a reraising high hand). It was probably about even money that the raise-bluff would work. But even if I was wrong, it couldn't have been more than 3-to-1 or 4-to-1 odds against its working, and I was getting a much bigger price than that.

I need to credit Ming with an inadvertent assist on the bluff for suggesting that we change the game. Often, if your opponent is engaged in conversation and he is speaking naturally, one can assume that he is unlikely to be bluffing. Ming gave me the opportunity to send out a false tell to Chau, which Chau found to be believable.

Phil's two cents: This hand illustrates the amount of reading, thinking, logic, gamesmanship, and bluffing that occur in poker on a hand-by-hand basis. Ted gives us a rare glimpse into his brilliant poker mind, and also a rare glimpse into the high-stakes poker world that runs 24/7 in Las Vegas.

JACK MCCLELLAND'S FOUR QUEENS AND Q-4

Four queens and Q-4, my two most memorable hands. First of all, the four queens, in a game of Seven-Card Stud. In the final hand of the 1989 Ladies World Championship at Binion's Horseshoe Casino, my late wife, Alma, slow-played a starting hand of three rolled-up queens. Her worthy and aggressive opponent, Adrienne Zoia, made two open pair, jacks and tens. But on the final card, Alma caught a fourth queen and won her gold bracelet! A fairy tale ending to a perfect day!

Her first words were "I did it just like Johnny Chan!" She was referring to an earlier viewing of the 1988 WSOP finals where Johnny had flopped the nut straight and trapped another great champion, Erik Seidel, to win the title. This same sequence is recounted in the movie *Rounders*.

Now for a very different way to accomplish the same thing. A couple of months ago, I was playing golf with my good friend



Jack "Shuffle Up and Deal" McClelland.

J. C. Pearson. I've been J. C.'s golf pigeon for many years. He usually plays just well enough to win the money! (I wonder if he learned that from his brother "Puggy.") J. C. was telling me that the key to winning at limit Hold'em was learning how to play and win with mediocre or bad hands. Now, J. C. is a very unorthodox player, but he is also very successful, and has won far more than his share of poker tournaments. So I listened. Equipped with these new jewels of wisdom, I made my first "solitary trip" (without Alma or my current wife, Elizabeth) to the Heavenly Hold'em tournament at the Commerce Casino in Los Angeles.

Over the years, watching thousands of tournaments, I have come to see the players falling into three categories. Group I are the survivors; these masters of the short stack can hang on forever with only a few chips. They wiggle their way into the money, and then claw their way up the payoff ladder, one rung at a time. This group includes such great tournament players as Ken Flaton, Artie Cobb, Mansour Matloubi, Mike Sexton, and Susie Isaacs. They are always hanging around the money positions late in the tournament, making the money a high percentage of the time.

Group II are the superaggressive players. They have almost a disdain for just trying to get a payday, just making sure to finish in the money. Late in the tournament, as the money approaches, they become more and more aggressive, many times finishing out of the money. But when they do arrive at a final table, they usually have a mountain of chips, and manage to finish in the top positions. They spend a lot of time at the jewelry store getting their poker bracelets and accessories sized and polished. This group includes great champions like Huck Seed, John Bonetti, Men "The Master" Nguyen, the late Jack Keller, Doyle Brunson, Barbara Enright, and Phil Ivey.

Group III, in my opinion, is the most dangerous group. They can sit patiently for hours, almost never playing a hand, while letting other players push them around. A half hour later, they have shifted gears, seemingly raising every pot, and the next thing you know, you're on your way to the rail, never knowing quite what hit you. This group includes the superstars of the circuit, such as Johnny

Chan, Russ Hamilton, T. J. Cloutier, Ted Forrest, Berry Johnston, Annie Duke, and the author of this book, Phil Hellmuth. They are also very successful side game players. (The ability to switch gears is an art in the side games, as well as in the poker tournaments.) These players divide their break time between the jewelry shop and conferences with their financial handlers. They get the money, one way or another, and that's how we keep score in poker.

I have always been a part of the survivor group. I developed that style through many years of playing small-limit side games and tournaments. My theory was that if you can put a "black mark" (winner) into your player's log every day, instead of a "red mark" (loser), then the weeks, months, and years will take care of themselves. I wanted to make some changes in my tournament game, and see what it felt like to play more like a group II (superaggressive) player, with hopes of one day aspiring to group III (dangerous) status.

The first time I tried this approach was at a \$200 buy-in limit Hold'em event that attracted 201 players who made 258 rebuys, for a prize pool of \$91,800. Although having pocket aces cracked twice, I steadily built up my chips, until we were down to about 40 players. At this point, I had about \$4,000 in chips, slightly less than the average, which was about \$6,000.

Going against my normal style of surviving, I started to raise a lot of pots. As my good friend Dr. Max Stearn has taught me, position is far more important than the strength of your starting hand. Every time I was in late position, my opponents could expect me to raise, raise, raise, and keep the pressure on. The next thing I knew, we were at the final table. I was running second, with about \$43,000 in chips, and my good friend of over 20 years, Cheryl Kaufman, was the leader, with a little over \$60,000 in chips.

Now, it would be nice to say that I caught a rush of good starting hands and won the tournament, but this is a different kind of fairy tale. Through the hours of the final table, the best starting hand I ever picked up was A-8 off suit. With my normal survivor game, I probably would have finished somewhere between fourth and seventh. But

this night, my right arm was possessed by Huck Seed or John Bonetti, and I caught flops like Men “The Master” Nguyen. What an adrenaline rush!

As we got down to five, I learned that one of the players, Frank Rite, was a big fan of Monty Hall, of *Let’s Make a Deal* fame. You see, Frank wanted to split the money up among the active players. (Today in poker tournaments, splitting the money among the last three, four, or five players is the norm.) But many years ago, after splitting a small tournament, Alma and I came home very unsatisfied, and made an agreement that we would never again make a deal at a poker tournament.

Now, I know that this sounds strange coming from someone who has presided over and fine-tuned “the art of the deal” in poker tournaments for hundreds of millions of dollars. But it was my feeling then, as it is now, that deals are unsatisfying, and bad for the game of poker. That keen, competitive edge, the excitement, the adrenaline and focus, are completely undercut.

This is, after all, a new millennium, and poker is becoming popular throughout the world. Television exposure and media interest are growing every day. For poker tournaments to attain the attention and respect they deserve, deals need to go the way of the hula hoop. Attracting corporate sponsorship, so that the players and casinos do not have to bear the brunt of the expense, is a must. The game can now be played on the Internet, and major poker tournaments are now being played online (like the site I represent and believe in, UltimateBet.com, which had a \$2,000 buy-in, One Million Dollar Prize Pool Guaranteed event on January 11, 2004). These sites will be only as successful as their integrity and reputation permit them to be. The days of deals are dead.

Back to the tournament. We were down to three players: Cheryl Kaufman, Frank Rite, and me. I had the chip lead with around \$100,000, out of \$230,000 total. During the next hour, the chips flew. I built up to \$150,000 in chips, and I was feeling pretty good about myself. Ten minutes later, after I lost a couple of pots to Frank, and bluffed off \$40,000 to Cheryl, I was down to \$40,000, and starting to

mumble to myself about what an idiot I'd been. But I knew that if I quit playing, I was doomed.

So I raised Frank with 10-9 on the button. He reraised, the flop came 9-9-2, and *bang*, I doubled up. Three hands later, I raised Frank with J-8 off suit. Two eights came on the flop, and *bang*, I was back in the game. The adrenaline rush was dizzying. Soon Cheryl busted Frank, and Frank ended up behind door number three.

We were now at the \$10,000–\$20,000 limit. So as tournament director Cheri Dokken changed the chips to \$5,000 increments, Cheryl and I took a break and talked about the past 20 years. Her husband, Craig, and I broke into poker together at the Sahara, moved up through the ranks, and have been friends, and quite friendly competitors, through the years. We congratulated each other, hugged and kissed, but then sat down and “went to war.” Isn't poker a wonderful game?

Now, finally, for my hand of the week, I raised with the Qd-4d on the button. Cheryl called with the J-7 off suit, and the flop came 10d-7d-4s. Cheryl flopped the better hand with a pair of sevens, but I had a great flop as well, with a pair of fours and a flush draw. I bet \$10,000, and Cheryl called; then the Jc came off, for Cheryl to make two pair, jacks and sevens. Cheryl bet \$20,000, and I called. Cheryl then bet her last \$15,000 in the dark, and just like a night 11 years before, a beautiful queen came up on the final card, making me the winning hand, queens and fours over Cheryl's jacks and sevens!

Four queens and Q-4, two very different ways to win a poker tournament. It wasn't like winning your weight in silver plus a million dollars, as Russ Hamilton had done, but it felt pretty good. On that night, angels were watching over me. May your dreams and fairy tales come true soon, too. Shuffle up and deal!

Phil's two cents: Yes, playing with both feet on the accelerator often works, but not nearly often enough to make it the choice of many champions these days. Too many “new” players play that way already,

and many of us have adjusted our play, and tightened up, because of this trend.

JOHN “BONO” BONETTI’S “FIVE HIGH”

In the late 1980s, there was plenty of high-limit action in Houston. The two games we usually played were no-limit Ace-to-Five Low-ball and No-Limit Hold’em. The blinds were \$25–\$50.

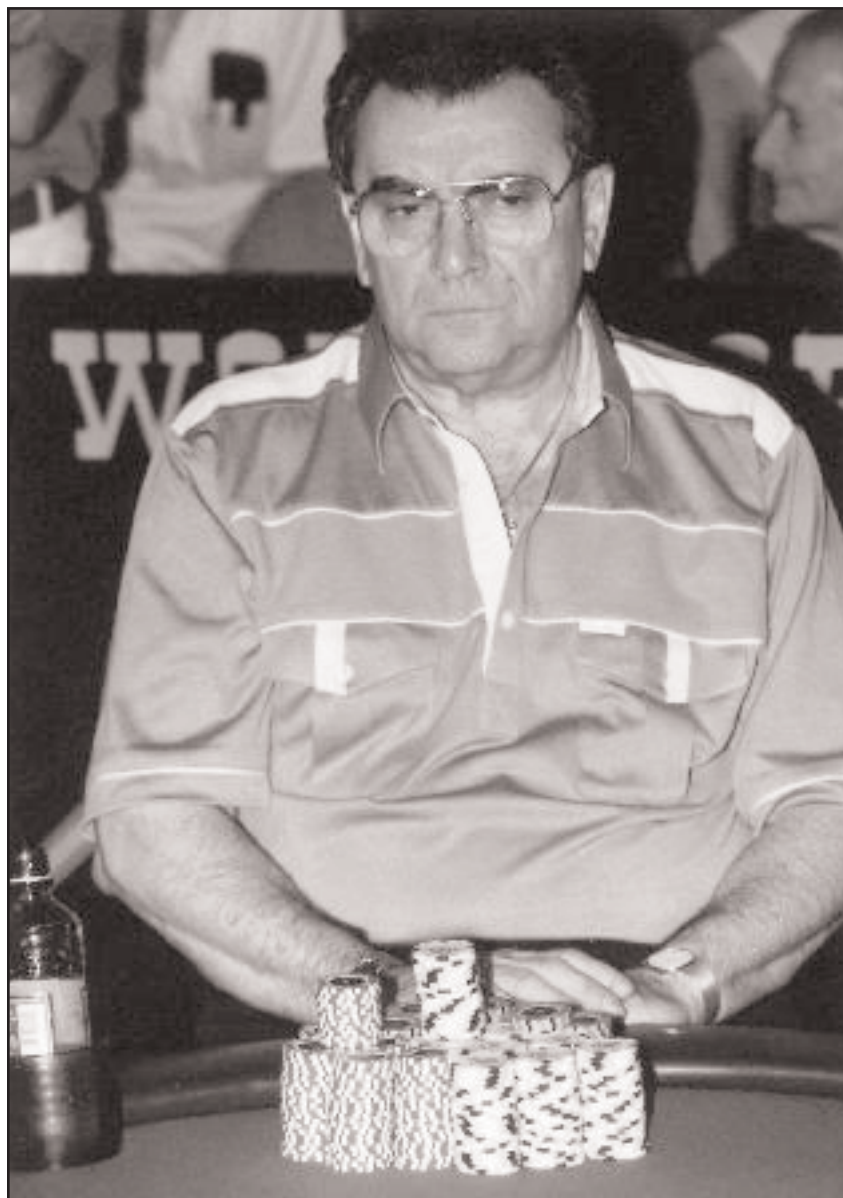
One day, there were some heavy hitters in a game that we played in a high-rise apartment on Main Street in downtown Houston. Some of the players in this game were Jesse Alto, Al Smith, George Bofysol, Stan Smith, Frank Henderson, D. C. Shula, Peter Vilandos, Henry Hodges (who wrote a remarkable book about his life story), and me, and there were many others whose names I do not recall.

Two of the players in the game both wanted to be the most-feared poker player in Houston. They wanted to beat each other so badly that it became a personal war between them. One day, the following hand actually came up between these two fellows, Joe and Sonny (not their real names).

It so happened that in this hand Sonny had the small blind for \$25 and Joe had the big blind for \$50. Two players made calls before the small blind. It was Sonny’s turn to act, so he looked at his hole cards and saw the 5d-3d. Thinking it would cost him only \$25 more, he called (which I think was a good play, because if you get lucky you can win a big pot).

Joe looked at his hole cards, which were two fours. Joe, also hoping that he might get lucky, raised the pot \$250 (there was \$200 in the pot already). He was hoping he might win the pot right there, or at least build a big pot. The two other players who had called earlier folded their hands. Now it was up to Sonny, and he called.

Then, with \$700 in the pot, the flop came 2d-2c-4d, giving Sonny an open-ended straight flush draw and giving Joe a full house of fours full of twos! Sonny, knowing he had a big drawing hand, bet



John Bonetti looking focused at the 1993 WSOP.

out \$1,000. Joe called the \$1,000 and raised it \$3,000 more. Sonny, having only \$5,000 remaining, went all-in. Joe called.

There was now \$12,700 in the pot. All of us were standing around the table, waiting for the turn and the river cards. The place was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. The turn card was the deuce of clubs. The river card was the deuce of spades, giving Sonny four deuces with a five kicker and Joe four deuces with a four kicker. Sonny thus won the pot with five high! Joe wasn't heard from for about two months (he took it kind of hard), but this story is a true one. They still talk about it in Houston. So help me.

Phil's two cents: Thanks for an entertaining hand, Bono. I really like the way "Joe" played the hand. His raise on the flop was a strong one. Most of the time, it's good to slow-play the top full house. In this case, he baited "Sonny" into moving all of his chips into the pot with a really inferior hand (Sonny must have been at least a 10-to-1 underdog). I like Sonny's bet of \$1,000 on the flop, and it would have been pretty hard for him to fold the hand at that point for \$5,000 more. But what a drawout for Sonny!

John Bonetti knows about big drawouts. About seven years ago, John had cancer in his bones and spine. The doctors did not give him long to live, but today his PSA count is zero! John turns 76 on Saturday, June 12, 2004.

DANIEL NEGREANU'S TWO TENS

In 1999, at the Commerce Casino's California State Poker Championships, I played a hand during the \$1,000 buy-in No-Limit Hold'em Championship event that caused me to lose a little sleep. I was three-handed in the toughest spot I'd ever been involved in—up to that point in my career. Ken Buntjer was chip leader with \$90,000, I was second with \$40,000, and the always dangerous John Bonetti just wouldn't go away with \$12,000 in chips. In your average tournament, the blinds would probably be something like \$3,000–\$6,000,



Daniel Negreanu smiling at the WSOP.

but fortunately this particular tournament had a lot of play to it, and the blinds were only \$1,000–\$2,000 with a \$300 ante.

I was on the button with 10-10, and I opened for \$7,000. Buntjer immediately moved all-in in the small blind and Bonetti folded. After about two minutes of deliberation, I decided to seal my fate and make the call. Did I make a mistake?

Well, let's look at my thought process during the hand. First of all, my personal philosophy is to always play for the trophy and forget about moving up the ladder; simply outlasting Bonetti didn't cross my mind for a second, even though the prize breakdown might suggest that I should have (first was \$54,000, second \$27,000, and third \$14,000). I like my raise of \$7,000 to go; I had been using that amount to pick up pots with weaker hands. Although I think you can make a solid case for moving all-in in this situation, I don't think there is only one way to play a hand like this, and moving all-in in a tournament with some play just isn't my style.

Now, let's concentrate on Ken's actions. I have tremendous respect for Ken's play. In fact, with two tables to go I envisioned a showdown with him. I was in the zone that day, too, and I had a lot of confidence in my reads. After playing all night with Kenny, I'd picked up a read on him from the way he'd played previous hands against me. My instincts told me I had the better hand; something he did led me to believe his hand was only mediocre. I knew he didn't have a bigger pair than mine; I was sure he held 7-7, 8-8, or 9-9, or in a worst-case scenario, two overcards to my pair.

If my read was correct and he had 8-8, then throwing my hand away would have been a huge mistake. On the other hand, if he held two overcards I was a small favorite, maybe 6 to 5, but I wouldn't want to roll the dice at that point, since it could eliminate me. I thought, too, that there was a chance he had a hand as weak as A-9 suited, which would also make me a pretty strong favorite.

With Ken's chip position, he could afford to make these risky plays, knowing that I would have to have a very big hand to call him. He could pick up a \$10,900 profit if I didn't call, and since he had the ace there was only one hand that he was in terrible shape against, A-A.

Playing three-handed, he knew I was going to raise a lot of hands on the button; and he wasn't going to simply watch me rob Bonetti's big blind. Unfortunately, he held the Ad-Qd and flopped a queen.

"You're welcome, John," I thought; after all, that play allowed Bonetti to sneak into second place. It was nice to see John rooting for me after the flop, though he did yell, "No ten, dealer, no ten!"

If I hadn't been up against two world-class players, I might have thrown my hand away. Against weaker players, I wouldn't have needed to gamble; with them, I could have done some more stealing, and could have found a better spot to make a move. But *these* two opponents were not going to let me walk all over them. They weren't going to give anything away.

If I had won that pot, then I would have had about \$83,000 in chips. At that point, I would have been solidly in the driver's seat, where I'm much more comfortable. But after discussing the hand with friends, I feel a lot better about my decision. I thought Ken had a pair, but my read wasn't entirely wrong; and I did have the better hand. Oh, well.

Many people have asked me why I didn't just make a deal, since this situation would have been a good spot for one. I never make deals. I think they're bad for the integrity of the game, and I was thrilled to learn that the World Poker Tour wasn't allowing them. Good job, WPT! You don't see Tiger Woods and David Duval on the 18th say, "You want to chop it up?" or Andre Agassi say to Pete Sampras, "Well, you're up two sets to one. I'll take an extra \$100,000, and you can have the trophy." That would be pathetic (and the TV ratings would drop like a rock).

Phil's two cents: I would have called with the tens as well, given that I felt I had the better hand. Sometimes our opponents' actions lead us to believe they are weak; or sometimes we just smell the weakness. (I'm sure you picked up on that.) I'll give you a little piece of advice for next time, though: don't forget to catch a ten!

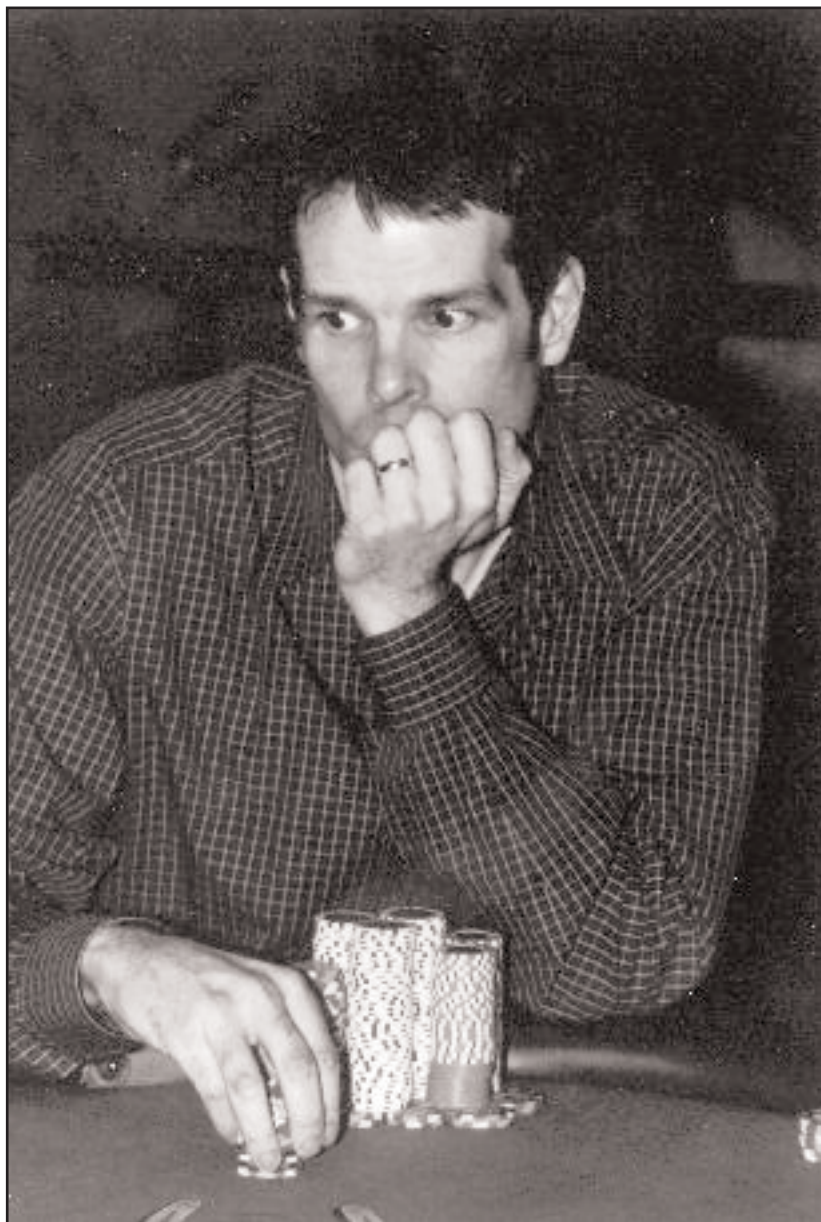
HOWARD LEDERER'S “PICK YOUR SPOT”

I had a dream. (Phil Hellmuth talking, for the moment.) I dreamed that Howard Lederer (“Bub,” to his friends) would win the Party Poker Million in 2002. But in 2002, Howard left that boat after being on board only about five minutes. Why did I have that dream? It wasn’t as if Howard has won very many limit Hold’em tournaments, and it’s not as if I dream too often about other players winning them, so who knows?

In 1999, as it happens, “London” Ali Sharkasheik dreamed that I would win the Poker EM (the European Poker Championship) in Vienna. He was right, more or less. As it happens, I did win the Poker EM, but in 2000—one year later. So I was expecting the same thing from Howard. I dreamed he would win in 2002, but I *thought* he would win in 2003, since he hadn’t won (or even competed) in 2002. I finally bet him at 4 to 1 with three players left when he was short-chipped. I should have bet Howard from the beginning (at perhaps 40 to 1), but I didn’t want to focus on anything but myself—and I was in there after the first two days of the tourney when the “to win” prices were high.

So Ali told me of his dream, and I told Howard of my dream. Did that help Bub and me win? Probably—it certainly helped me win—but let’s stick to the quantifiable facts here! Howard did win the Party Poker Million in 2003, making him the winner of an amazing two World Poker Tour (WPT) events. That’s two ahead of Chan, Seidel, Cloutier, Ivey, Juanda, and me. (Gus Hansen has the honor of winning three WPT events.) On top of that, Bub was in the print media for the WPT, which was running in *People* magazine and *Sports Illustrated*. Go, Howard, go!

Bub and I cowrote this story about a key hand at the WPT event at Foxwoods in 2002, where he threw away A-K with a king on the board on fourth street. If he had called and won, he would have had over \$12,000, but instead, despite having \$2,500 in the pot, he folded, leaving himself only \$3,500 with the blinds at \$100–\$200. “I later found out that I was beat,” he said. “Had I called there, I would



Howard Lederer intently studying the competition.

have been out, and then who knows what would have happened. Certainly I would not have won Foxwoods, and perhaps not the Party Poker Million II, either.”

Shortly after making that laydown, Bub found himself in the big blind with \$3,900 and 9-9. Adam Schoenfeld opened in middle position for \$600, the button called with short chips (leaving himself with \$2,500), David Levi called in the small blind, and now Howard faced a decision. He debated calling and trying to make a hand, or moving all-in and trying to win the \$2,400 in the main pot. Howard figured that the button and the small blind couldn't have him beat. Thus, if he moved all-in, he had to worry only about Adam's hand.

Howard opted to move all-in, and when Adam's hand hit the muck Howard breathed a big sigh of relief under the cool exterior of his poker face. Bub was actually pleased when the button called his last \$2,500, figuring that he wouldn't be calling with A-J or A-Q, and that he would have already moved all-in with A-K over the top of Adam. And when Levi went into the tank, adding up the pot and calculating the pot odds, Howard began to root for him to call as well, thinking Levi had a pair underneath nines. By the way (“by the way” is one of Bub's favorite sayings), Howard put the button at 5-5, which is in fact what the button had. After about two minutes, Levi called as well, with 3-3.

When Bub's hand held up, he was now back up to \$11,500 and right back in the mix. He feels that the lesson here is that waiting for the right spot to move your chips all-in is an important key in poker tournaments. In this case, Howard would more likely have ended up with \$12,000 by making a good laydown, in order to wait for a better scenario later.

In other words, putting your chips in badly, lured by the size of the pot, when you're in tough shape, is just too easy. Better to just wait for a better situation. As Howard says, “Make the laydown, and realize that the chips that you leave yourself may prove to be the chips that you'll win the tournament with.” He sees too many frustrated calls by players today in poker tournaments.

LAYNE FLACK'S "TWO BLACK NINES"

This is the first time that Mr. Hellmuth has allowed me to write up a key hand 100 percent on my own. How fitting that it involves pocket nines, as we all know; and I mean, we all know who this hand really belongs to. Right, Phil? [Yes, Layne! I won the World Series of Poker, in 1989, with two black nines, when they held up against Johnny Chan's As-7s for a \$1.2 million pot.]

It was the 2002 WSOP (World Series of Poker). I had won the first no-limit Hold'em tournament, which saw 628 players or so. The talk was, "Oh, Layne won another no-limit, yada, yada, so what," right? Then came the second no-limit tournament with 549 players, and I found myself in contention to win another bracelet.

We came to a close on the first day, and after that hard day of playing and drinking—these tournaments require solid focus, hence the drinking—I looked up, having paid little attention to the other tables, to see how tough the road to victory was about to be. I mean, how much worse could it be! I already had Johnny Chan to my right and Erik Seidel to my left! (Once again, this tournament showed me that no-limit does bring out the best at the WSOP, and people do rise to the occasion.)

On day two, I was one of the chip leaders, and I picked up two red nines and lost a "coin flip" (my opponent had A-K) and half of my stack. A while later, I picked up the black nines and won all of my chips back, plus some. This set the tone for the real hand I will tell you about. So hold on.

As we reached the final table, I noticed that it seated many great, and I mean great, players: Johnny Chan, T. J. Cloutier, Carlos Mortensen, and Chris Bjorin, to name some!

(By the way, it's funny that my story isn't about another hand that came up at the final table that day—an unbelievable hand featuring my quad tens over German player Philip Mamorstein's quad fours!)

Anyway, it was finally down to me, Chan, and T. J. The chip counts were about \$320,000 for T. J., \$280,000 for me, and \$170,000 for Johnny. I picked up the two black nines, which like I said had

a history that day, because I'd already won one big pot with them. [Phil Hellmuth note: The Black Nines Room is the official name of my Web site, www.philhellmuth.com.]

With \$2,000–\$4,000 blinds and a \$500 ante, I raised it to \$12,000 to go. T. J. moved in \$300,000 more. What do you do here? Without hesitation, I called all my money. Was I silly or wrong? Did I have correct odds? (For the record, I do think it was probably a close call.)

So why did I make the call? History, of course. After all, they were the black nines. (Just kidding; that wasn't even close to the reason why I called!)

The real reason I made the call was simple to me. T. J. had moved over the top of many of my raises all day long. Then he would show the table an ace, not A-K, not A-Q, but a lone ace. That led me to believe he had a "rag card" with his ace. Once in a while he would flash the A-K; granted, this was my risk.

The biggest factor of all, really, was this fact: I'd made a raise earlier in the day and T. J. reraised, but this time he stopped; and he thought; and he counted his chips; and finally he put in a teasing or well-thought-out raise. There were no callers, and then he showed Q-Q, and on a similar occasion, A-A. But where was that pause and the teasing raise this time? Ah, thank you for the read, T. J. I picked up on it quickly and was waiting for my opportunity to take advantage.

It also flashed through my mind, as T. J. moved all-in quickly, that he might have one of three hands. First, he might have A-rag, and I'm a big favorite over this hand. Second, he might have ace high with a ten through a king for a kicker, which means it's a coin flip. Third, he has an overpair, and I become a 4-to-1 underdog. Now what do you do? With the read I mentioned above, I felt like he didn't have an overpair, so it was a simple decision: call.

One other thing was this: I was playing T. J. and Johnny Chan, and no one said that it was going to be easy! No one said that it's not going to take a big risk for something to happen against two of the world's greatest no-limit players. So the calculated risk just went way down then, I believe—just ask me.

By the way, T. J. had A-K and I flopped a nine—with a J-9-8 flop—and “filled up” (made a full house). I went on to my second no-limit victory at the 2002 WSOP, but this one was my favorite, since I gained a lot more respect for my no-limit game because of the field and who I had to beat. Afterward, I felt great, and I mean great. My hat’s off to T. J. and Johnny. They are two of the all-time great champions, and it is an honor and a privilege to play with them.

MEN NGUYEN’S “DRAWING DEAD”

This story takes us back to the 2000 World Series of Poker (WSOP). I was playing in the \$1,500 buy-in Seven-Card Stud Low (Razz), and was lucky enough to reach the final table, where strategy is all about amassing chips. We were seven-handed, playing \$1,000–\$2,000 limit, when an intriguing situation came up. Here’s how it played out, and how I trapped my opponent into drawing dead.

I was in seat 1 and was dealt (3-4) 7, the seven being the door card. Seat 5 brought it in with the high card on the board, and World Champion Tom McEvoy called with a door-card eight. I raised it to \$1,000 to go with my seven and ended up heads-up with the player in seat 7. On the turn, I caught a five for (3-4) 7-5, and Tom caught a ten, for a board of 8-10. He checked, I bet \$1,000, and he then called. On fifth street came an interesting decision: I caught an ace for (3-4) 7-5-A (I had made a seven low!), and he caught a jack for 8-10-J.

These were my thoughts: from this point on he had no chance to beat me. Even if he were to catch perfect, the best he could make was an eight low, and I already had a seven low! The bets were \$2,000 now, and the prospect of him folding was not what I had in mind. I needed chips. I knew that if I checked, I had a chance to make him think that I had paired up, and maybe he would buy a great low card for his hand and give me another \$2,000. So I decided to play sly like a fox and trap him! I checked and he checked. As good as my plan was, unless I caught ugly and he caught pretty, my options on sixth street would be the same as on fifth.

Sixth street came, and I bought a king and he bought a deuce.



Men "The Master" Nguyen.

His board now read 8-10-J-2, and mine was (3-4) 7-5-A-K. If I did have a pair, then the best I could have at that point in the hand was a king low. It was therefore possible, from my opponent's vantage point, that he had me beat. He checked, and then I checked. I thought about betting here on sixth street, but betting would have looked too suspicious after I had received a king. By checking, I was assuring myself of a call on seventh street, whether he improved his hand or not.

After seventh street was delivered, Tom checked, and I bet \$2,000 without looking at my last card, and he beat me into the pot to call my \$2,000 bet! Then I showed the seven low and he said,

“Nice hand, sir.” [Phil Hellmuth note: “Nice hand, sir” is Men’s favorite phrase!] Remember, at any level, and especially at the WSOP, it’s not so important to make a hand as it is to maximize your opportunities to lure every chip you can from your opponent. This hand I played “perfecto.”

Phil’s two cents: Men really earned that extra \$2,000 bet! Sometimes, trapping your opponent is a great strategy, especially in Razz.

“MIAMI” JOHN CERNUTO’S “SEIZE THE MOMENT”

Five years had gone by since my last visit to Foxwoods Casino. I had taken it off my tournament trail endeavors because it was too far away, and I disagreed with some of their procedures. But I had done well there in the past, so I decided to make the trip in November 2000. Well, let me tell you, I was very impressed with the changes that had been made. The director of poker operations, Kathy Raymond, and the tournament director, Mike Ward, had really turned things around. Middle- and high-limit poker were spread daily, and were prioritized. The action varied from very good to spectacular, and those who made the trip were made to feel at home. The tournaments were started on time and were structured extremely well, especially at the \$1,000 level. Also, two-hour rounds were used at the final table, giving the players plenty of time to make their moves. Congratulations to Foxwoods for building a nucleus of tournament enthusiasts in the New England area! More than 1,000 players entered the first two events!

I witnessed an amazing hand develop during the \$500 buy-in no-limit Hold’em event. The blinds were \$25–\$50, with a middle position limper. A local player, Sammy Haddad, was on the button with pocket sevens, and raised the pot to \$200 to go. The small blind, holding A-x, called the raise along with the big blind, who was holding A-J. The limper, who was holding K-K, reraised to \$600

to go. Then it was call, call, call. There was \$2,400 in the center, and then came the flop: A-9-3 (two of them spades), with all stacks about even (Sammy had a little bit more than the other players).

Off we went. First, the small blind bet an unbelievably novice wager of \$100 into the \$2,400 pot with his two aces, no kicker, and a neon sign saying, "Steal me, please!" The big blind took his ace with a jack kicker and slung them into the muck, too overly concerned about the next two players to act. The K-K grimaced, but saw an opportunity to catch a king cheap, and called. Sam Haddad also saw a cheap call for a seven, but then spied a bigger opportunity and moved in with his sevens and got the expected results: fold, fold. I had played with Sammy the night before at the final table in limit Hold'em. He's a gutsy player with a lot of heart; he truly deserved the pot. His risk was almost nil, and he couldn't go broke.

What makes this hand amazing is the fact that any of the four players could have won the pot, owing to the novice player's having made such a small wager. The A-x could have won it with a reasonable bet, but his poor position and lack of experience caused his demise. The A-J had a golden opportunity to win it with about a \$1,000 raise. His fear of betting into the two other players caused him to falter so badly that he didn't even call the \$100 bet! The player with the kings could have made a similar bet, but he was too concerned about what Sammy might do, and missed his opportunity. He also missed it during his pre-flop reraise. With \$800 already in the center, his \$400 raise was way too small. A reraise of about \$1,200 would've won it right there. What was actually accomplished by his small reraise was that he invited disaster, which came in the form of an ace. It could have been really disastrous if the flop had come Q-7-2! Sammy won the pot because he read the situation, seized the opportunity, and then put the \$2,600 on top of his stack. That's one of the intangibles that a good tournament player has in his arsenal.

No need to wait on premium hands. Opportunities will arise. Just be sure that when you see your opportunities, you don't hesitate. Just seize the moment!

PETER COSTA'S "SMALL-BET POKER"

During my early years of playing tournament poker, I decided to experiment with various styles of playing pot-limit Hold'em. One of these experiments was slow-playing, or underbetting, some of the strong hands. This led to many situations in which I would make a succession of small bets—even with the nuts. I would often show these hands down, and as a result I was mostly given a lot of respect when making a small bet.

This led to many bluffing opportunities in which I needed to make only a small bet in order to steal a pot. Although this style of play would occasionally open the door to a bad beat when I did have a big hand, it did pay many dividends over the long run. One such hand took place in my local casino (the Gala) in Nottingham, England, in 1993.

The event (somewhat of a big one in those days) was a £200 buy-in pot-limit Hold'em event, with multiple rebuys. From a starting field of around 80 players, I found myself among just 24, but with a very small stack. With blinds of £800–£800 (in those days, the two blinds were the same), my stack of £5,800 was looking weak.

But, having just posted both blinds, I knew that I had a whole round to pick up some sort of hand, and that I had no need to worry. I was right! On the very next hand, I was dealt 3-3. What a hand! After failing to get any sort of a playable hand for the last two hours, this one looked like a monster. And as each player folded to me on the button, my hand grew in strength.

I would simply raise the pot to £3,200 and take the blinds. Both of the blinds had about the same-size stack as mine. I felt sure that if I found either of them with any kind of hand, they would be forced to call. I would then be in a position of needing to get lucky. Thus, I decided to slow-play this "monster," and just raise the minimum. I fully expected to get at least one caller, but at least this way I could represent a hand without having to commit most of my stack. It also allowed me the opportunity to make a steal from the perfect spot—I was on the button.

The first blind thought about it, but reluctantly mucked his

hand. The second blind, a somewhat tight lady player, just flat-called. Hmm . . . I knew she had some sort of hand, but obviously not good enough to reraise me! Oh well! Perhaps I could get lucky and flop another three?

The three did not hit, but the second blind did check the flop of K-Q-Q rainbow. I now liked my hand! I had to make a stab at the pot somehow. But what could I bet with just £4,200? Bet the pot of £4,000 and hope she had not connected with the flop? Checking was an option, but a very weak one. Having represented something of a hand with my minimum pre-flop raise, I decided to follow it through with a minimum bet. I was sure that if she did not connect with the flop, she would have no problem mucking her hand.

With a slight hesitation, and to my disappointment, she called my bet of £800. That was it! I was done with the hand! It was now obvious to me that one of her two hole cards was a king. Her reluctance to call was based only on the many times that she had seen me underbet big hands. But with the size of our stacks of around £4,200, there was no way I could get her to muck. She would reluctantly call. I waited for the three to hit the turn. It did not! But it was a big, beautiful ace.

I know she didn't like that card at all. Her tap on the table to indicate a check came as no surprise to me. All I now had to do was to bet the pot and almost all-in. I reasoned that she could not call with just a king in her hand; at least, not now that the ace had hit the board. I did ponder for a moment that she might have held a queen, but I felt certain that she would have simply reraised all-in after I had bet on the flop.

Experimentation in poker is a complex thing, but it is only complex to the extent that you disregard the simple and the obvious. Like betting all-in in this case and simply taking the pot. I became greedy for another £800 of this lady's chips. She would be forced to call and try to river another king. And so the reluctant £800 was thrown from her hand into what was now a nice pot. I was playing the odds, and hoped for any card but a king.

The king did not hit the river! But a dangerous jack did. She then

took another look at her hole cards and checked. It was that close! With a board of K-Q-Q-A-J, she needed only a ten for a straight. But her check was assuring; she did not have a straight.

Experimentation over with! I simply moved all-in with the knowledge that she would muck what I thought was K-9. She did declare, “I muck,” as she picked up her hand to throw it to the dealer. I asked her if her K-9 was suited. She asked how I knew it was K-9 as she threw them faceup on the table. I explained that it was a long story and that I had A-Q for a full house.

And yes, the K-9 was suited! As for my being on the button, I felt sure that she would have called any pot raise before the flop. That was one of my thoughts during my drive home after winning the tournament that night.

They say that necessity is the mother of invention. In poker, it could well be that invention becomes the necessity. That was another thought that night.

ANDY GLAZER’S WALKING BACK TO RENO

My journey to the Peppermill in 1999 was mostly supposed to be a fun road trip with Phil and his two kids—who are really great kids. I’d never taken a four-hour drive with two kids before, and I learned that all those clichés about kids asking “Are we there yet?” are true.

As it turns out, Phil and I both made the final table of the \$300 buy-in no-limit Hold’em event, and I was pretty excited because we’d never been at the same final table before. I was really hoping it would come down to the two of us, but Phil never picked up any hands and wound up going out seventh when his big reraise with his Ah-Kh got moved in on by his opponent’s pocket queens. There was too much money in the pot to let it go at that point, and Phil lost the coin flip.

Eventually, I got heads-up with Sam Caliva, a nice fellow from Houston, with a chip lead of about \$70,000 to \$56,000. I kept think-

ing how grateful I was that I had learned a few things about heads-up poker in the initial World Heads-up Poker Championships, and also wishing that I had played a few more of the events, because I knew there was lots more I didn't know!

The tournament came down to two big hands. On the first, with the blinds at \$2,000–\$4,000, Sam had the big blind, and I looked down from the small blind to see pocket sixes. I raised it to \$11,000 total (I had been holding my raises to a consistent size), and Sam decided to come over the top of me for another \$28,000.

I thought a long time. This was the first time Sam had come over the top of me in maybe 45 minutes of heads-up play, and although I'd win the tournament if my sixes held up, I'd have been handing him a two-to-one chip lead if they didn't. I'm not a big fan of calling big raises with small pairs. If my opponent has a bigger pair than my pair, then I'm a huge dog, and even if it's a move with two overcards like 10-9, we still have a coin flip.

I laid it down. After the tournament, Sam told me that he'd been feeling desperate and had made the move with K-2. The old "re-sulto-spectro-scope" had me wishing I'd called, but I still think I'd lay it down again. (I'll have to see what Phil thinks.)

The second big hand that I played was my big lesson. I had been trying to set up a trap, doing a bit more limping in than I'd normally do because Sam hadn't been raising my limps, and I thought I could nail him if I picked up a big hand. Unfortunately, nothing exciting arrived, but hey, winning a no-limit tournament is supposed to be about moving your chips well, not catching a lot of cards.

Anyway, I finally found my trap hand, A-K, and limped in from the small blind. Sam checked, and the flop came 4-5-9. He checked this flop, and I had my second brain freeze of the final table (the first was worse, more like a hallucination than a brain freeze, but fortunately it cost me only a few chips) and moved in. He called, pretty quickly, with 4-7. An ace did come on the river, but a second four had already hit on the turn, and I was down to about \$11,000 in chips, which didn't last long with the blinds at \$3,000–\$6,000.

Although I've found any number of rationalizations for the play,

the best being that Sam had shown an unwillingness to call big bets after the flop with anything less than top pair, I still think the play is bad coming and going.

A-K isn't a good trapping hand heads-up, because if an ace or a king hits the flop it's hard to get an opponent to call any sort of large bet; and if the ace or king doesn't hit, any sort of random hand, like Sam's 4-7, can quickly turn into a favorite. The concept of setting up the trap was fine, but it works much better with a stand-alone hand like J-J.

Meanwhile, after the flop, I relied too much on Sam's prior unwillingness to call big bets. I had a slight chip lead, and there was no need to put most of my chips at risk like that, when there was only \$12,600 in the pot.

They used to call A-K "walking back to Houston" in the old Texas road games, because so many players went broke with it. It broke both Phil and me that day, although he went out raising pre-flop with his and I went out betting post-flop with mine, a very big difference. It was even a guy from Houston who sent me walking with it that day!

I'll tell you one thing, though; it's a lot easier to write about these tournaments than it is to play in them!

RICHARD TATALOVICH'S BIG HAND

In 2000, I was involved in an interesting and important hand at the end of day two of the Championship no-limit Hold'em event at the Trump Taj Mahal's United States Poker Championship. I'll need to give a little background on the action leading up to this hand to better explain why the hand played out the way it did.

We were down to the final two tables, and the blinds were \$1,000-\$2,000 with a \$300 ante. I had been gradually but steadily building my stack and was among the chip leaders at my table. I had been aggressively defending my blinds, often reraising the players who moved on my blind pre-flop. Everyone at my table eventually

gave up challenging my blinds, unless they had a big hand. The only exception was Eric Panayiotou, who was seated on my immediate right. He continued to come after my blinds, and I kept playing back at him. Often, he would have to lay down his hand pre-flop or on the flop. I sensed that he was getting frustrated, and I expected that he was about to start repopping me before the flop with less than a premium hand, just to test me. I didn't have to wait long.

The very next hand, he was on the button, and I was in the small blind with two red jacks. He limped in from the button, and I raised it. I was careful not to overbet my jacks, but I wanted to bet enough to force the big blind out, so that if Eric intended to mix it up on that hand, at least I wouldn't have to play my jacks against two opponents. So I raised four times the size of the big blind. The big blind folded and Eric came over the top, doubling my bet. I gave it a little thought and decided to see what the flop would bring. I didn't necessarily give Eric credit for a big hand, since I had anticipated his move prior to the hand being dealt, and I figured that he was not giving me credit for having a hand. The flop came down Q-4-2, all hearts. I bet \$10,000. Eric doubled my bet to \$20,000, and I called.

At this point, there were several reasons why I thought I was in the lead. First, I felt that I had got a pretty good read on his play, as well as on some of his mannerisms, and if he had the nut flush, he would have just smooth-called. Second, the pot was already pretty large, so that if he had a flush that wasn't the nuts, he would have moved all-in, I believed, to shut me out of trying to draw to a fourth heart on the board, in case I was holding a bigger heart than his hearts. Third, he would have had to move in with a set or two pair to shut out the potential flush draw that I might have had. And, finally, if he had a queen with a big kicker, I surmised, on the basis of his play of the previous several hours, that he would have made a larger raise. I thought that his most likely hand was an A-K with the ace of hearts.

The turn brought a black rag. I bet another \$10,000, and Eric immediately raised me \$10,000 more. While pushing the additional

\$10,000 in, I said, “I’ll call and check blind on the last round of betting.” There seemed to be a look of confusion on his face when I said that. The ball was now in his court. If an ace or a king spiked on the river, and he bet, then I would muck my hand. If a heart hit and he bet, I would have a little tougher decision to make, since I would have the third nut in that case, though I would also have mucked in that situation. But if the ace of hearts had hit on the river, that, too, would have presented a tough decision, though there I would have called, with the second nut.

The river brought a blank. It was Eric’s turn to act, since I had already checked blind. He contemplated his next move for close to five minutes. He now had about half of his sizable stack in the pot, as did I. If he had nothing, he knew he couldn’t win unless he bet and I folded. He knew that if he bet and I called, he’d be busted out of the tournament. That was the heavy decision he was faced with. He finally checked, and I turned over my pocket jacks. He flashed his cards to me as he threw them into the muck. I saw the ace of hearts but didn’t see the other card clearly, though I’m assuming it was a king. Eric seemed to be very upset with himself when he saw my jacks, and he told me that if he had moved all-in, there is no way I would have called.

Well, my friend, I will tell you that you made a good check. If you had said all-in, I would have beat you in the pot with my stack, and your wallet would now be lighter by the \$79,500 that you earned for your very respectable third-place finish. I took over the chip lead with that hand and never relinquished it for the rest of the tournament. It proved to have been the key hand for me in the tournament. It was a tricky and treacherous hand and a bit scary, with basically that whole major tournament at stake for me. But after I had processed all the information leading up to that hand, as well as the information I’d picked up during the hand as it unfolded, my gut instinct told me that I had the best hand.

Fortunately, that time I was right. I’ve found that in almost any tournament I’ve ever won, I’ve had to be willing to lay it all on the

line, usually more than once, and go with my gut. If I'm wrong, I'll be headed for the exit; but as long as my decisions are based on an informed analysis, I'll have no regrets.

Phil's two cents: I did talk to Eric the very night that these two played this hand together, and he told me that he had held A-K, so Richard was right. Eric asked me if he had misplayed the hand, and I told him that Richard was a hard man to bluff! One thing he wrote that I loved was that he went with his gut. Richard went with his gut, thus he went on to win the U.S. Open Poker Championship. Well done, Richard!

7

Poker Hollywood Style

*C*an celebrities play poker? Yes. In fact, their acting skills, and certainly their money, give them a competitive edge. Tobey Maguire, Leonardo DiCaprio, Ben Affleck, David Schwimmer, Larry Flynt, James Woods, Norm McDonald, and other top actors play in major tournaments, and many have their own weekly game. In 1992, basketball's Dream Team had a regular high-stakes no-limit game featuring Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Charles Barkley, and Scotty Pippen. Another Hollywood poker game features Chevy Chase and Johnny Carson. Los Angeles Lakers owners Jerry Buss and Frank Mariani can be found on any given night at a card club in Los Angeles.

Right now, Celebrity Poker Showdown (on Bravo) and Hollywood Home Game (on the Travel Channel) showcase the skills (and nonskills) of some of the stars. (Of course, some of the play I've seen

on those shows is suspect.) Did you know that Gabe Kaplan (Welcome Back Kotter) and Larry Flynt (of Hustler) are two of the best celebrity poker players in the world today? From what I've seen, it won't be too long before Leo, Ben, and Tobey become three of the better stars in the game. Here are a few hands featuring some of these celebs.

AN L.A. LAKERS HAND

The setting for this hand is much better than the hand itself—especially in my eyes, because I lost the hand! In 1996, Jerry Buss and Frank Mariani, the owners of the Lakers, invited a few of us high-stakes poker players to the Lakers training camp in Hawaii. Huck Seed and I were pretty eager to attend. Can you blame us?

Unfortunately for Huck and me, we were up all night long before we flew to Hawaii, and, instead of sleeping on the plane ride, we played high-stakes Chinese Poker all the way to Honolulu! When we arrived dead tired at the Hawaii Prince Hotel in Waikiki, we spotted Johnny Chan even before we got out of the car. Johnny told us that the Lakers players-only dinner was about to start, and that we were invited. Cool! So naturally we went right to the players' dinner—having not slept in 30 hours.

At Jerry's request, a poker game was arranged to begin after the players' party. The game would be held in Jerry's suite—the honeymoon suite! Believe me, the honeymoon suite at the Hawaii Prince Hotel is something to see. It's at the top of the hotel and looks out over the beach, the docks, and the ocean. We watched the sunrise from up there, and it was amazingly beautiful.

Johnny Chan, Yosh Nakano, Jerry Buss, Huck Seed, Phongthep "Tab" Thiptinnakon, and I were the participants in a \$400–\$800 limit Hold'em game. By the way, Jerry prefers Hold'em, and he recently finished second in a World Poker Tour invitational event. Former NBA star Cedric Ceballos (I'm not sure who he plays for now) watched us play for a while. Such a nice setting. It's really too bad that Huck and I got massacred for over \$30,000 apiece in the game!



Lakers owner Jerry Buss playing his favorite game—Texas Hold'em.

During the course of play, the following great hand came up between Jerry and me. I raised it up by making it \$800 to go with 10s-8h in the second position. Jerry reraised and made it \$1,200 to go with Ks-10d on the button (last position). The flop was 7s-9h-Ad. I checked, Jerry bet \$400, I check-raised to make it \$800 to go, and then Jerry called the \$400 raise. The turn card was Jc, and thus the board was 7s-9h-Ad-Jc. I then bet \$800 with the nut straight; Jerry raised it up, making it \$1,600 to go; and I reraised, making it \$2,400 to go. Jerry called.

The “river ran swiftly” when the Qd became the last card, making the final board 7s-9h-Ad-Jc-Qd. I bet \$800 with my queen-high straight, Jerry raised it to \$1,600 with the nut ace-high straight, I raised it \$2,400 to go, Jerry raised it to \$3,200, and I made the out-of-my-mind raise to \$4,000. Assuming (I’m sure) that we both had the nut straight at that point, Jerry just called me.

It’s painful for me even to recall this hand, and the \$4,000 I lost on the last card. First of all, I had made a bad raise with 10s-8h. Why play that “garbage” (weak hand), especially in the second position? Since Jerry knew I was on tilt, he made a good reraise before the flop with Ks-10d. On the flop, I made a good check-raise with an open-ended straight draw. Jerry made a good call, although a fold here would have been equally wise. After all, I could easily have a pair of aces here, in which case he would have been in really bad shape.

On fourth street, I made a good bet with the nuts. Jerry made a questionable raise with the double-belly-buster straight draw (he needed a queen or an eight). Why raise when I had shown so much strength? On the river, I love my raise to \$2,400. Jerry easily could have had A-Q or even just A-K (not to mention a lot of other hands). But I was really out of my mind to reraise to \$4,000. When Jerry made it \$3,200 to go, I should have known better. When I made it \$4,000 to go, I was committing to putting in another \$1,600 on the end if Jerry did have K-10 (which was very likely), because I would have had to call his last reraise.

Speaking of which, why didn’t Jerry make it six bets to go (\$4,800) with the best possible hand? Was he feeling sorry for me?

Yeah, right! No, he just couldn't believe that I could put that much money in without the same hand that he had. He really did think it was a tie hand. After all, what reasonable player would put in five bets on the end without having K-10? Sometimes, assuming that your opponents are "reasonable" can cost you a bet!

During the poker game that night, I asked Jerry why he didn't sit on the floor at the Lakers games. He told me it made him nervous to be so close to the action. I told him that I loved to sit on the floor. I'll never forget watching Michael Jordan play while I was seated courtside—the energy that he put out was amazing. Or watching Derek Harper talk trash all night with, of all people, the opposing fans!

When Huck and I went to the concierge the next day to pick up a package, it turned out to be a white envelope with two floor tickets for the exhibition game between the Lakers and the Nuggets.

Thanks for the seats, Jerry. It's too bad that they cost Huck and me over \$30,000 each!

LAKERS OWNER FRANK MARIANI'S HAND

At a recent Legends of Poker tournament, Frank Mariani (co-owner with Jerry Buss of the Los Angeles Lakers) made a \$500 last-longer bet with John "Bono" Bonetti. Bono had no idea what he was getting into! If Frank had not made the bet, then he might indeed not have lasted very long. But the bet with Bono gave Frank some incentive to play his A game. Frank Mariani's A game is pretty good!

Although Frank did not make the final table that day, he did make the final two tables—much to my close friend Bono's dismay. A couple of days later, in Omaha Eight or Better, Frank made the final table with me. He busted me that day, after he flopped a wheel!

Frank Mariani is a first-class guy all the way. Ever since I can remember playing high-stakes poker in L.A., he has been around, playing. He has been nice enough to invite Huck Seed, Yosh Nakano, Eric Drache, Johnny Chan, and me to the Lakers training camp

every year. After I attended a recent Lakers game as Frank's guest, and with the usual postgame poker play in progress, his wife, Lynn, offered to take my wife all the way across town to our hotel. We still remember that really kind and considerate gesture. I must add that I have never seen Frank in so much as even a disagreement at the poker table in all these years.

Anyway, the following hand came up between Frank and me at a Bicycle Club Casino's limit Hold'em tournament. There were about 20 players left when Frank raised it up to \$600 to go, in the first position with As-Ks. The small blind reraised to \$900 with Kd-Kh, I made it four bets with Ah-Ad, and Frank and the small blind quickly called the cap of \$1,200. Fortunately for me, Frank had started the hand with only \$1,900.

The flop came 10s-Jd-Qc, which gave Frank the nut straight. The small blind bet \$300, and I just called. Frank made it \$600, and the small blind made it \$900. I called, and Frank called \$700 of the \$900 all-in. On fourth street, the Qd came off to make 10s-Jd-Qc-Qd on the board. The small blind bet \$600, and I called. The last card was 4h, so that the final board was 10s-Jd-Qc-Qd-4h. The small blind checked, I bet \$600, and the small blind called. The \$5,700 main pot went to Frank with a straight, and I won the \$2,800 side pot with aces up.

The chips went to good use, because Frank proceeded to win the tournament. Now let's take a closer look at what happened.

Before the flop, it seemed that everyone played their hands right. On the flop, I was already in defensive mode because 10-J-Q was one of the worst flops that I could imagine. With that flop, a lot of legitimate hands beat my pocket aces. Hands of 10-10, J-J, Q-Q, or A-K would all beat my A-A. Not to mention that K-K, 9-9, and 8-8 would still be drawing against my hand. The small blind's bet on the flop was OK, Frank's raise was obviously correct, and I like the reraise by the small blind to try to get rid of me. (Maybe I would then fold 9-9 or 8-8.)

The bet by the small blind on fourth street was weak, but not too bad. After all, what hand did he put me on? I had capped it pre-flop

and called three bets on the flop. My call on fourth street was pretty easy, even though I thought that I might be beat. Also, I knew the player and thought he had aces or kings.

I like the small blind's check on the river (it's about time!) and I like my bet, too. Of course, my bet is only good if I'm willing to throw it away for a check-raise on the end. The small blind really does have a tough call on the end with kings, since he can only beat a bluff, or the incredibly unlikely A-J (unlikely that anyone could have played A-J that poorly!).

Frank, good luck with the Lakers every year! (Although they are so good, they don't need luck.)

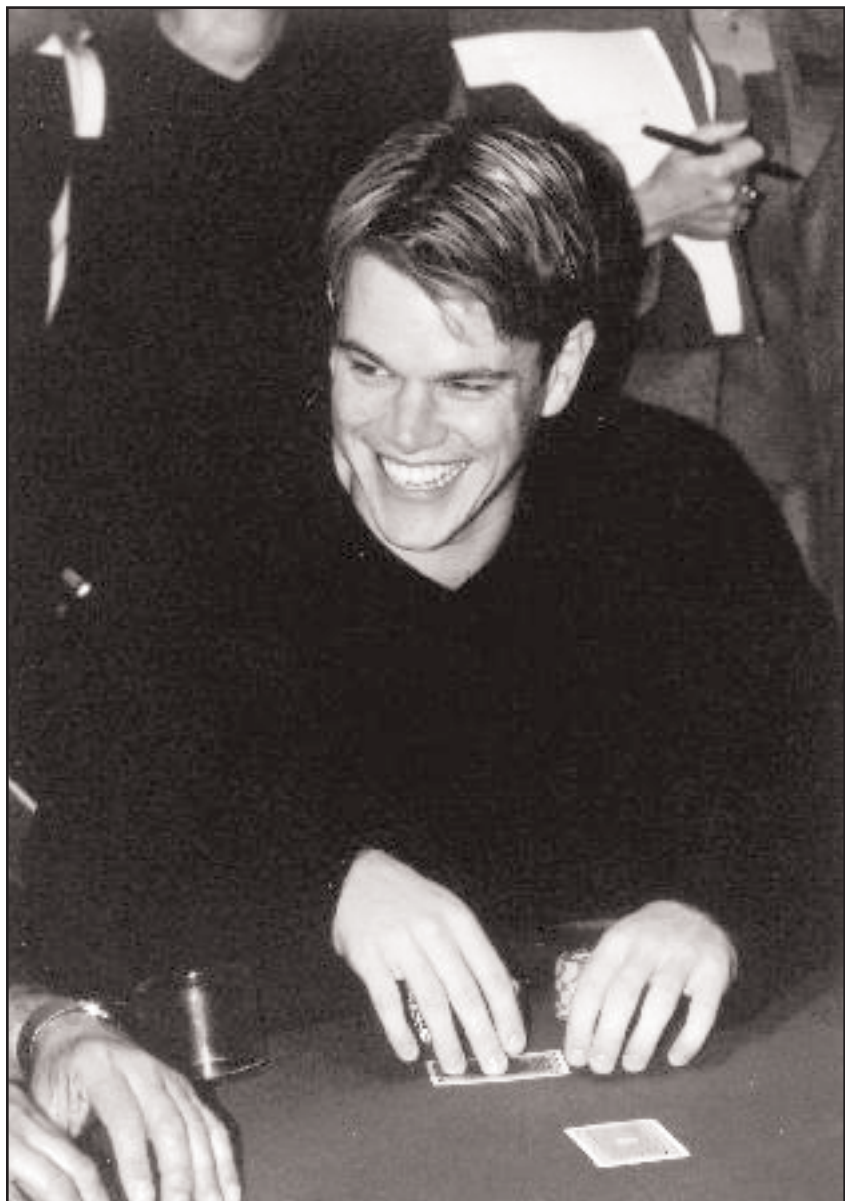
ROUNDERS

In 1998, I watched Matt Damon and Ben Affleck win Academy Awards for cowriting *Good Will Hunting*. They were hooting, hollering, and acting all pumped up. I loved the fact that they were acting their age when they were presented the awards on stage. They were in their mid-20s, and were a breath of fresh air.

That's what I remembered when I heard that Matt was coming to the 1998 World Series of Poker. The next thing I knew, I heard that I was invited to meet Matt and Edward Norton at the top of the Horseshoe for a late Sunday morning brunch. I brought my wife and two sons with me to that meeting/greeting, and later on that evening, I gave Matt and Edward some private lessons.

These guys are both brilliant! Matt went to Harvard for a time, and Edward graduated from Yale. They both could converse philosophically, and engagingly. Whether the subject wandered towards politics, Buddhism, or the stock market, they were both quick as a whip.

I told them both, "Play tight, but don't hold back when you have pocket kings before the flop, or when you flop a set." The next day, I was the first of the three of us to be eliminated! It was a rare day one exit for me in the Big One, but I stayed on in Vegas to root for Matt and Edward.



Matt Damon at the 1998 WSOP.

A little while later, Edward was out. I asked him how he had been eliminated, and he said that the flop had come down 10-9-6, and that he went out with pocket nines! His opponent had had pocket tens. Wow! With that hand and that flop, there wasn't too much anyone could have done to avoid losing all of their chips.

Edward and I wandered over to find Matt to see how he was doing. It wasn't hard to find him; the *Entertainment Tonight* cameras were focused on him at all times! As I watched, Matt raised it up on the button, and Doyle Brunson reraised Matt all of his chips from the small blind, and Matt called Doyle quickly. Matt had about \$6,000 total, and a pair of pocket cowboys (kings) down under. But Doyle had the pocket rockets (pocket aces)! When no help came for Matt, he gave a great interview, concluding by saying, "I lost with a great hand to a great player. I have no complaints. Good luck, boys."

Afterward, Matt, Edward, and I sat around chatting for a while on the rail. While the three of us were talking, Harvey Weinstein (the head of Miramax) decided to run an impromptu charity event—I'm sure it was to keep the press around. We would play a one-table freeze-out for \$10,000, with the winner to choose his favorite charity.

As depressed as I was (it is always the worst poker/business day of the year for me when I get eliminated from the Big One), it helped to have two movie stars trying to pump me up for the charity event! With Matt and Edward cheering me on, I played in the charity event, even though I wanted to crawl into a hole for a day.

The three of us, Jim Albrecht, and six other lucky volunteers made 10 players total. Sadly, Matt and Edward outlasted me again! And this time, I watched closely as they both played a very good no-limit Hold'em game. I was impressed; the two of them put on a fine show, especially considering that they were both basically beginners.

Later on, after the charity game ended, we headed up to the top of the Horseshoe for a late dinner and drinks. Of course, they kept the place open for Matt and Edward until 1:30 A.M.! It helps to be a celebrity. Afterward, Matt, Casey Affleck (Ben's brother), and I headed out to the Hard Rock Cafe, where Matt and I drank,

smoked cigars, and played blackjack all night long. We had a great time.

That night Matt and I discussed Buddhism, and the concepts of karma and “real happiness” (not that either one of us is a Buddhist). What I remember most about that night was something Matt said to me: “Phil, just because someone is rich, and appears to be happy, doesn’t mean they have real happiness. You don’t ever know until you’re in their shoes.”

If you have to get eliminated from the Big One on day one, I highly recommend hanging out and drinking with a genial movie star all night long!

BAD BEAT IN CELEBRITY POKER

The following hand was written by Phil Gordon, who, in addition to being a great poker player and a self-made Internet millionaire, is the host of Celebrity Poker Showdown.

The first season of Bravo’s *Celebrity Poker Showdown* was a great success. Although most of the players had very little experience, they were all in good spirits and trying earnestly to win. Especially in the championship show.

Each player in the finals started with \$10,000 in chips. The winner of this table would be able to donate \$100,000 to his or her favorite charity; second place, \$20,000; and third place, \$15,000. The finale would be viewed on Bravo, or possibly NBC. The stakes, and the pressure, were high.

At the \$200–\$400 level, Paul Rudd, who is most famous for his role in *Friends*, looked down under the gun and found 6-6. He raised to \$1,000, leaving him with just a bit more than \$5,000. The talented and beautiful Nicole Sullivan, from *The King of Queens* and *Mad TV*, saw a J-7 off suit. She was on the button and had about \$20,000. For some reason, she called.

The flop was a glorious A-10-6 rainbow, a perfect flop for Paul. Now, Paul is quite a good player, and I really thought he would try to check-raise. But instead, he surprised me and moved all-in, for about \$5,000. Not the world's greatest play, really, because Nicole would need a monster hand to justify calling \$5,000 to win \$2,000.

Well, she started thinking. I was sitting in the announcer's booth thinking, "What in the hell is she thinking about!" She then announced, out loud, "Paul, I think you're bluffing!" Great read, Nicole. Paul was bluffing with a set of sixes. After about two agonizing minutes, she decided that yes, indeed, Paul was bluffing, and she said, "I call."

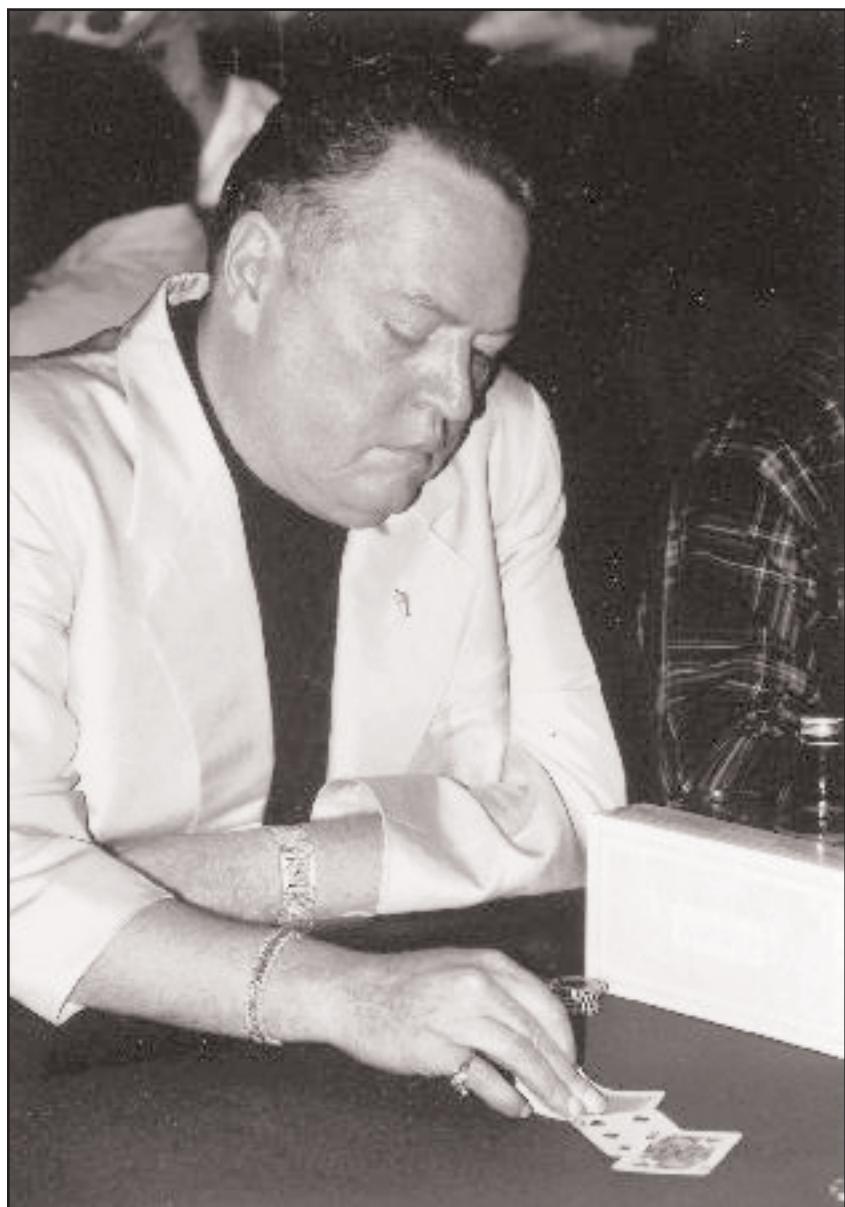
The players turned over the hands, and we were, well, absolutely shocked. Paul was a lock, of course. Nicole's only outs were runner-runner king and queen, or runner-runner nine and eight. A 35-to-1 shot or so. Paul was already standing up and had his arms up in triumph. Nicole looked like someone hit her in the stomach. "I'm so stupid," she muttered to the camera.

After everyone finished laughing, the dealer turned a queen. A quiet hush fell over the audience, and the tournament director, Robert Thompson, told the crowd the news: "Well, now all Nicole needs is a king!" Nicole now had about an 8 percent chance to win.

With a flourish and some high drama, the dealer flipped over the miracle card . . . a king! Nicole had called Paul's "bluff" and took a 35-to-1 shot all the way to the bank. Paul was eliminated in a most brutal manner, and Nicole went on to win the tournament and claim the \$100,000 prize purse for her charity, the Alley Cat Allies, a group dedicated to spaying and neutering stray cats.

HUSTLER

The following hand was written by Ted Forrest, who is widely considered one of the best all-around poker players in the world these last six years.



Larry Flynt making the final table at the 2000 WSOP Seven-Card Stud event.

During the past seven years, I have had both the pleasure and the misery of playing Seven-Card Stud with Larry Flynt, owner of the Hustler Casino and publisher of *Hustler* magazine. There is no better word to describe Larry in business, in poker, and in life than “hustler.” Larry has overcome tremendous odds for most of his life, and a lot of that has to do with his attitude and his “hustle.” Soon I will describe a hand to you in which Larry was able to overcome incredible odds—actually, he was drawing almost dead. In fact, I was pretty sure he was drawing dead, but it was a pleasure to watch Larry’s hustle.

I consider Larry to be a good friend of mine. But he has an “ask no quarter, give no quarter” attitude, especially with his friends. In business and in poker, he is a hard man to get the best of. The two principals in this amazing hand of poker were Larry Flynt and his good friend Gabe Kaplan, of *Welcome Back Kotter* fame. [Phil Hellmuth note: Gabe is one of the best celebrity poker players in the world over the last fifteen years.] The game was \$1,500–\$3,000 limit Stud, with a \$300 ante and a \$500 bring-in bet with the low card by suit on board.

The hand started tamely enough with only Larry and Gabe just calling the \$500 bring-in bet. Larry called showing the 8c, and Gabe limped in with the 7s. On fourth street, Gabe caught the 10s to go with his 7s and bet out \$1,500. Larry called the \$1,500, showing 8c-4d. At this point, Larry’s hand was (6-7) 8, 4—Larry had a gutshot straight draw—and Gabe had a four flush with (Js-2s) 7s, 10s.

On fifth street, Larry pairs his door card (eights) and bets \$3,000 into Gabe’s 10s-7s-3s board. Gabe immediately raises the bet to \$6,000 with his made flush. Gabe is a somewhat conservative player, and most of the players at the table knew that it was unlikely that he was raising Larry’s open pair with only a four flush. Larry, however, just shook his head and proceeded to call the \$3,000 raise with one pair and a gutshot straight draw.

On sixth street, Larry caught a second open pair (eights and fours), with a hand of (6-7) 8, 4, 8, 4, and proceeded to bet. Now it was Gabe who shook his head and called the \$3,000 bet. I think it was at this point that Larry became convinced that Gabe did indeed

have a flush. Larry didn't look at his last card. He kind of looked at Gabe, and then he shrugged and smiled shyly as if to say, "Sorry, buddy, I've got to bet my hand," and threw his \$3,000 bet into the pot in an almost apologetic manner. Gabe thought for a few seconds, then laid down his flush. Larry felt like it would be good for the game to show the bluff. So he did.

Kudos to you, Larry. It took big brass balls to bet into what you must have known was a flush. Most people would have assumed that once Gabe had called two open pair with his flush on sixth street that he was going to call again on the river. Larry's shrug, and the way he looked apologetically at Gabe as he was betting, convinced most of us at the table, including Gabe, that Larry had a full house. I came away from that game with a lot of respect for Larry Flynt's "hustle."

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Cheesehead Poker

*P*oker players don't become successful overnight. It's a gradual process of moving from friendly games to high stakes. You need to play to improve, and you need to lose to give yourself the incentive to improve your play. Improving one's game is definitely a trial by fire.

These days, you can read strategy guides such as *Play Poker Like the Pros* or watch tapes like Phil Hellmuth's *Million-Dollar Poker System*, or practice or play on the Internet (of course, I recommend *UltimateBet.com!*). But not too long ago the only way to learn was to get in the game. This chapter discusses a few of the more memorable hands from my time in and around Madison, Wisconsin, while I was still learning the game.

COLLEGE STUDENT MEETS “BIG AL”

I started playing poker in Madison in about 1986, and in 1987 I was introduced to “Big Al” Emerson. Big Al is a tough professional poker player originally from La Crosse, Wisconsin (he now lives in Arizona). Al is a great guy: friendly, jovial, and loyal. Al and I have been friends since he started taking me on the road with him to Minneapolis and to Fargo, North Dakota, in 1987.

One day, Al came to my rundown rental house in Madison (I was still a student at the University of Wisconsin) to play poker in my game—poker is legal in Wisconsin as long as there is no rake. (A “rake” occurs when someone is taking money out of each pot to go to the house.) I was having a nice little \$1–\$2 no-limit Hold’em game there. I remember that another old friend of mine, Wayne Tyler (nicknamed “Tilly”), was in the game. At this point in my poker life, I did not know Madison poker legend Dewey Weum (Dewey finished fourth at the 1998 WSOP). By about five in the morning, everyone else in the game had quit, and Al and I were both winning. We began playing heads-up when the following hand came up.

I opened by making it \$7 to go with 4-4. Al called and raised it to \$21 to go with 7-7. I called, the flop came 2-2-7, I bet out \$30 with two pair, and Al called and raised it to \$100 to go with a full house (what a flop for Al). I studied a long time, then reraised all of my chips (about \$450 total). Al instantly said, “I call,” and showed me his full house (sevens full of twos).

As I stared in a daze at his hand, I realized that I had no outs. I could win only with a four-four finish! The turn and the river were blanks. Al had busted everyone at the table in his first appearance at my game.

I like my opening bet of \$7 with the 4-4. You might as well start to build a pot in case you do flop a set. I like Al’s reraise to \$21 with 7-7; he’s finding out how strong I really am. I like my call of \$21 (\$14 more) with the fours. I like my bet of \$30 on the flop. I’m indicating that I have at least a pair with the \$30 bet. I love Al’s raise with the top full house. Too many times people slow-play their

hands in this spot. I'm not saying that slow-playing is bad, just that sometimes you can trick your opponent by playing your strong hands fast.

If you do slow-play the hand, then often an ace or king or some other scare card comes off on fourth street to kill the action. My reraise of all of my chips (\$450 total) wasn't pretty. Al had raised me the same way, with nothing, a couple of times earlier in the game. But even given that Al had raised me a couple of times earlier with nothing, risking my entire stack with two fours in a pot that had been raised on every possible occasion by my opponent sure sounds like a terrible play to me today.

Big Al truly outclassed me in this match. He bluffed early, so that I would call him later. He confused me by betting all of his chips with the nuts. I was used to everyone slow-playing hands in my world. At least I made a friend that night!

I remember that night Al and I had a long discussion about what I needed to do to improve my no-limit Hold'em game. For this, thank you, Al. I remember that Al talked at great length about what being a professional poker player is all about. For this, thank you, Al. That night, Al invited me to go on the road to some really "good" games with him. For this, thank you, Al. I remember Al told me, that night, that he wouldn't tell his worst enemy to become a professional poker player. You know I love you, Big Al, and thanks for this last piece of advice—but I'm sure glad I didn't listen!

THE WRONG MAN TO BLUFF

Back in those days, in about 1988 or so, I discovered a \$2-\$4 limit game in a small place called Players Bar on the east side of Madison. By that time, I had been playing poker professionally for about two years, and my game was far superior to those of the others who played there. Every Saturday, this game would start at noon and go on until bar time (about 1:00 A.M.).

Even though the game was only \$2-\$4 limit, I found myself

winning about \$300 every Saturday, which at the time came in quite handy. I really enjoyed playing in that game, because of both the people and the atmosphere. (Of course, it didn't hurt that I won every week!) Imagine playing poker at a small round bar table, raised up high and meant for four people maximum, crammed in next to a pool table with the jukebox blasting all night long. Sounds too loud and too cramped to you? It was, but I sure had a good time!

The brothers who owned the bar, Mark and Al Kroon, were two of the locals who played every Saturday. They both played well. (Later, Mark won a Four Queens tournament in 1996, and a free trip to the Super Bowl in 2004 on UltimateBet.com as "Pokerho.")

One night, we introduced no-limit poker to the game, and the following scenario, involving Al Kroon and me, came up. We were playing no-limit Omaha with a \$1 blind. Somehow I got involved calling a bet with a hand in which I had no pair, no draw, going for me. It was just a stone-cold bluff (kind of like what Daniel Negreanu or Huck Seed might try to do to you!). You see, Al bet out \$25 with one card to come, and I decided I would call his bet just to bluff him out on the end—there was both a straight draw and a flush draw on the board. Sure enough, the flush card came off, and I fired out Al's last \$42.

Al was very suspicious of my bet (for good reason!) and studied me for a long couple of minutes. Finally, he folded, and then asked me to show my hand. Naturally, I couldn't resist showing a bluff, because I figured it would get me a lot of extra action later, when I had the goods. I then proceeded to turn my hand faceup. But Al didn't react the way I thought he might have.

The next thing I knew, I was lying flat on my back on the pool table with Al's hands firmly encircled around my throat! I've heard John Bonetti say many times, "I had him by the throat!" But Bono never meant it quite like this! So there I was, lying flat on my back on the pool table. Al had my arms pinned to the pool table, and my legs were hanging off the edge. I was starting to lose oxygen and feeling totally helpless. Talk about bluffing the wrong guy!

Imagine this: everyone else in the game was trying to pull Al off of me, and I was thinking, “Is this really happening?” I mean, it happened so fast. One second I’m smiling, showing off my bluff, and the next second I’m lying defenseless on my back on the pool table right behind my bar stool, with someone’s hands around my throat!

Despite the fact that Al wouldn’t immediately let go of my throat, I was never really all that worried about my safety. But I did realize, for the first time in my life, how delicate my throat was, and how easy it would have been for me to get really hurt.

Within a minute, we were all back playing poker, and I made a point of sitting next to Al the rest of the night. I didn’t want him to think I was afraid of him. I just never bluffed him again . . . ever!

HOME GAMES AT THE WOLF’S DEN

Back in my poker-playing days in Madison, there were regular \$5–\$10 limit poker games on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Wayne Wolf’s place. Wayne originally ran the Sportsmen’s Club south of Madison. He would take members on a bus trip to hunt in northern Wisconsin twice a year. In the beginning, his business was all about the Sportsmen’s Club, but over time it became all about the poker game.

Initially, Wayne kept up the Sportsmen’s Club image by decorating the walls with stuffed animal heads, but eventually even these were replaced by an old green poker table against the wall. When he started in the business, Wayne made his money from the dues paid by the Sportsmen’s Club members. The Wolf’s Den, an old, green, rundown three-bedroom house (it might sound awful, but the place had a certain charm), was open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and Wayne began to run his poker games five days per week.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, we played another regular game at a local bar. If, at bar time, the players wanted to continue play, we would go over to the Wolf’s Den and resume our game at 1:00 A.M. If

a player ran into hard times, he might actually live with Wayne Wolf at the Wolf's Den. Sometimes, two or three people lived at the Wolf's Den, in addition to Wayne. The poker game was never short-handed with so many players living there!

I have fond memories of playing poker at the Wolf's Den. I always liked Wayne, and he was always good to me. While the other games had strict rules, seemingly designed to pull me away from my family at dinnertime, Wayne didn't care what time you showed up to play!

One game at Nora's Bar (later at the Crossroads Bar) had a rule that you had to show up at 7:00 P.M. in order to have a seat. I wound up missing that game quite a bit. But Wayne's poker games would start at 2:00 in the afternoon, and I would usually show up at 10:00 P.M. after putting my wife and kids to bed. Of course, I usually woke at 1:00 in the afternoon, so I was relatively fresh for the next late-night poker game. Believe me, being fresh didn't hurt my overall results at the Wolf's Den.

With more than 40 players rotating in and out of the game, there was always action in Madison. In fact, our annual Super Bowl poker tournament always drew at least 35 players. Players like Tuli Haromy, Gary Miller, Big Al Emerson, Dewey Weum, Wayne "Tilly" Tyler, Tommy Hun, Chad "I Had" Blackburn, Russ Bouffiou, Tommy Sperel, Denny Ruff, Morgan Machina, Matt Cooney, Bruce "The Fox" DeWitt, Larry Warmke, Larry Michaels Beilfus, Laura Balch, Phil Carey, Don Eithun, Betty "Boop" Johnson, Gary Hines, John Clauder, Robin Selvag, and Jerry Metzger frequently were involved in the poker games in Madison. In 2004, Madison area poker is still alive and well, with new players like Jon Green and Timmy Belstner.

Sometimes the games at the Wolf's Den were low stakes, and sometimes they were high stakes. One night, memorable for me, we were playing pot-limit Hold'em with \$5-\$5 blinds, and I set the record loss for any poker game ever held in Madison: over \$20,000! It was Big Al Emerson, Matt Cooney, and me playing that night at

the Wolf's Den. I remember that I was ahead about \$2,500, Matt was winning about the same, and, until Matt started lending him more money, Big Al was out of money and credit that night. In fact, we were about to quit when Matt offered Big Al \$500 more of credit.

Things began to change, and as I hit the break-even mark for the night, I began a classic Phil Hellmuth meltdown. Break-even felt like a \$2,500 loser to me, and I started to tilt, because we had almost quit, and now I was all the way back down to even! Later that night/morning, "even" looked pretty darned good to me. A couple of hours after Matt extended Big Al the additional \$500 in credit, Matt was out of money and out of credit from both Al and me. To be sure, Big Al had given Matt a lot more credit than Matt had given Big Al, but enough was enough. When Matt dropped out of the game, I had lost over \$7,000!

Imagine Big Al almost quitting broke, and then, three hours later, sitting with over \$12,000 in chips in front of him, and a stack of markers as well! Unfortunately for me, that night, Big Al was willing to give me as much credit as I wanted!

I do remember that I deserved to lose whatever it was that I lost that night (just over \$20,000). I do remember trying to bluff Big Al out when he had four of a kind—not a good time to try to bluff a guy! I do remember being deeply depressed after I quit and drove home. After all, it's not often that you set a record for most money lost! As you know, I like to set records!

Though that disastrous night is still fresh in my mind, even after all this time, I still have fond memories of the Wolf's Den and all of the players in Madison, Wisconsin!

CHAD BLACKBURN REMEMBERS

My old friend Chad "I Had" Blackburn, who now works in real estate in Madison (Chad still plays a lot of poker as well), recalls four interesting hands from the old days. When Chad had just begun

playing poker on the Madison circuit in about 1992, the following hand came up in the \$2–\$3 pot-limit Hold'em game at Nora's Bar (the game was later moved to the Crossroads Bar). Chad remembers me coming in at 10:00 P.M. and blasting (raising and reraising) every hand before the flop, and then betting the pot size on every flop!

I did generally come in at 10:00 P.M., chiefly so that I could hang out with my wife and son a while longer; besides, the game started at 4:00 P.M., and by then there were a lot of chips on the table. "Blasting" also sounds right to me. After all, the game was relatively tiny compared to the \$400–\$800 games and the huge buy-in poker tournaments that I had become accustomed to by then. My theory at the time, picked up after years of trial and error, was to play superfast with nothing (winning many pots on the bluff), and then bust someone when I did finally have a big hand. That is a very volatile way to play pot-limit Hold'em, but it often worked well for me, as this story demonstrates. In the middle of all the blasting, Chad called \$80 before the flop with 3-3, and the flop came down Q-8-2. Because I had previously bet a lot of money with nothing, Chad decided to check-raise me his last \$360 on the flop. The three on the turn put a big smile on his face—until I showed him pocket Q-Q.

The second and third stories involve us playing "monkey poker" (playing hands in the dark in the pot-limit Hold'em game) while Chad was dealing the game. Chad remembers me betting and raising hands without even looking at them until the flop (at that point, I would sometimes look at my hand, sometimes not, but I would always bet). One hand, there was a lot of action between Dewey Weum (a tough table presence) and me. The flop came down 4-5-7, and I had bet out \$120 without looking at my hand, and now Dewey called the \$120 and raised me \$360, whereupon I looked at one card and moved him all-in for \$230 more. I had looked at a six, and knew that I had at least an open-ended straight draw; the other card, which I looked at after I moved all-in, turned out to be a three.

I had played the hand in the dark and flopped a straight with 6-3 off suit!

After I busted Dewey that hand, he said, “How can you beat a guy who plays like a monkey?” Thus the term “monkey poker” was born. Four hands later, after Dewey had rebought for \$1,000, I had about \$250 in the pot before I even looked at one card. After Dewey bet the flop, I looked at one card, a king, and saw a board of K-8-8. Everyone knew I had looked at only one card (they watched me), and when I raised Dewey’s \$100 bet on the flop \$180 more, on the strength of looking at my one card on the flop, Dewey decided to move all-in with 9-9. I might have folded, but my other card was a king, for K-K, and a board of K-8-8!

Chad’s final recollection was a hand he played against a local player, Tommy Hun. Chad had borrowed \$50 from Big Al Emerson, and was down to his final \$13 when he called an extra \$1 in the small blind with 10-3. The flop was A-10-3, and Chad moved all-in, only to see that Tommy had flopped the top two: aces and tens. But the final card was a three, and Chad ran that money up to \$1,800 for the night.

Right before that game began, Chad needed to be “comped” a free meal at Denny’s by Wayne Wolf. The very next night, Chad was eating at a four-star Madison restaurant, the Blue Marlin, and drinking Dom Pérignon with dinner. And he was buying! In fact, that little \$13 eventually became \$10,000, all because of a miracle last-card three.

“THE GREAT J. P.” SINGS ON

In the late-1980s and early-1990s, when I was a young, up-and-coming poker player in Madison, the big game in the state of Wisconsin was a \$5-\$5 blind pot-limit Hold’em game. The buy-in was only \$200, but by the end of the night everyone would have many thousands of dollars in front of them. Most of the players in the game would put on the “live blind” (“live blinds” are put on without

looking at your hands; each one is double the last) for \$10, and almost everyone would also put on the \$20 live blind as well.

I have fond recollections of both the game and the players in it. It was the kind of game where, one night, we all moved in \$200 apiece on the first hand! We had the \$10, \$20, \$40, and \$80 live blinds on! The next thing we knew, everyone was all-in!

The lineup of players made this game a lot of fun: the regulars included Dewey Weum, Big Al Emerson, Freddy Wakine (a tough player who owned a huge bar and restaurant in La Crosse), Tom “Bomber” Anderson (another tough player who owned bars and restaurants in Wisconsin Dells), Gary Miller (a tough pro poker player), J. P. “The Great J. P.” Havenor (who owned a bar and finance company and was the biggest winner in the game), Matt Cooney (a tough player and businessman), Lauren Persons (another tough player and businessman), and many other part-time players (like Bill “Porky” Dearth, Al “Triple A” Anderson, Bob Servan, and “Bowser”), and me.

It was a tough crew to play against, and I’m sure they helped me hone my pot-limit and no-limit poker skills. Late one night, when the stacks of chips were massive, the following hand came up. J. P. had the \$10 live blind on; Lauren had the \$20 live blind on. Bob Servan made it \$65 to go from the opening position with K-K, Dewey called on the button, I called in the small blind with 8d-5d, and J. P. called in the \$10 live blind with 9c-7c.

Lauren raised it \$315, which made it \$380 to go (\$65 + \$315) from the \$20 live blind with A-K. In turn, Bob smooth-called the \$315 raise with his kings, Dewey studied and called, and I contemplated making the call. Eventually, I called, because I figured that everyone had at least \$3,000 in front of them, and that my call would bring in J. P. When J. P. hesitated, Dewey and I said, “C’mon, J. P., let’s gamble with the boys!” (It was OK to say stuff like that in this game.)

J. P. eventually called, and the flop came down 9s-9h-9d! I checked, and J. P. checked with quads. As Lauren made a \$1,300 bet,

he said, “Well, at least I know that no one is in there with a nine!” Bob now moved in for about \$2,800, a \$1,500 raise. Dewey and I folded very quickly, J. P. now called \$2,800 cold, and Lauren called the raise all-in (about \$1,500 more) with almost the exact same number of chips as Bob. Of course, the four nines held up (a three and an eight came off), and J. P. sang as he won the pot. Singing by the winner might offend the losers of a big pot in a lot of games, but when J. P. sang, all you could do was laugh (or smile)! You see, J. P. sang whether he was “buried” or the big winner in the game, and he was, and is, loved by all.

Let’s take a closer look at the action during this hand. I like Bob’s raise pre-flop, but why did he smooth-call Lauren’s \$315 reraise? If Bob had come back over the top of Lauren’s \$315 reraise with his kings, then he might well have doubled up against the A-K. I remember that Bob had been extremely unlucky that day, so maybe he was waiting for a non-ace flop before he moved all-in. Still, he had too many chips in front of him to mess around and slow-play pocket kings.

I like the calls that J. P. and I made before the flop, because we’d had a chance to win a big pot if we’d hit our hands. That \$315 sounds like a lot of money for 8d-5d or 9c-7c, so it’s important to take a look at the pot odds. With three or four players already in the pot, and the possibility of busting someone with \$3,000 in front of them, let’s go! I don’t like calling a \$315 bet if your opponents have only \$1,400 in front of them.

I like the reraise (\$315) that Lauren made before the flop with A-K. I like J. P.’s check with quads on the flop, and I love Lauren’s bet of \$1,300 on the flop. Lauren’s bet is both a semi-bluff (it would be very hard to call with just two eights in the pocket) and an “I need to protect my hand” type bet. Lauren’s bet was also a good one because he knew that Dewey, J. P., and I had garbage pre-flop (as evidenced by our lengthy pre-flop calls). What Lauren did not count on was that Bob had slow-played a big pair.

But what’s up with Lauren’s call of roughly \$1,500 more on the

flop? What hand did he think that J. P. had check-called \$2,800 cold with? J. P. would not have slow-played pocket aces in this spot. In fact, Dewey and I had had to talk him into calling pre-flop. Yet he lobbed in \$2,800 cold fairly quickly on the flop. It looked like—and smelled like—four nines. With what hand did Lauren think Bob had raised \$1,500? Obviously, J. P. and Bob were not drawing! It looked like a clear fold on the flop for \$1,500 more.

Of all the poker games that I've played, pot-limit Hold'em is one of the most enjoyable. It is so much fun to move stacks of chips around, and I love to bluff, to pick off a bluff, to move all-in, to flop



Phil flew his friends back to Madison on a private jet after winning the 1989 WSOP.

a set, to have my hand stand up for a mountain of chips, or, even better, to draw out for a mountain of chips! The combination of playing pot-limit poker *and* playing it with the great group of guys that I used to play with—well, that was a treat. Thanks for the great memories, boys!

Appendix 1

A GOLF STORY

In August 2000, I attended Russ Hamilton's golf tournament in Lake Tahoe. The entry fee was about \$2,000, but that covered airfare from Vegas, a room at Harrah's, three greens fees (including one on the famous Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course), prizes, and bus rides to the venues for three days of golf action. Over 50 poker players ended up attending this tournament in 2000. The golf magazine *Maxim* sent a writer to cover the high-stakes golf action. Discovery Channel even sent a camera crew to follow some of us around. Wendeen Eolis brought a movie producer to the event, to give him some inspiration about high-stakes golf matches for a golf movie he was working on. By the way, Wendeen also went ahead and won the Russ Hamilton golf tournament's final no-limit Hold'em tournament, for which the first prize was a "Card Player Cruise."

My group on the first day at Sierra Nevada Golf Course consisted of Layne Flack, Ralph Rudd, Jack Ryan, and me. Sierra Nevada is a beautiful golf course with a lot of desert and trouble, but none of the dreaded trees that hurt my slice shots so much. After I

shot a 99 and Layne shot about 95, he and I decided to play Ralph (105) and Jack (93) a two-man scramble for about \$1,000 a team (\$500 a man) a hole. In a two-man scramble, both players on each team hit a drive, then the team (both players) selects the better drive, and then both players hit their second shot from that spot. The same thing goes for the third, fourth, and fifth shots. Because of these shot selections, a two-man team usually makes a lot of pars and some birdies, but we are all bad golfers, so we made three bogies and one par for the first two holes of competition.

Layne and I thought we had the advantage, because we knew we were longer off the tee than Ralph Rudd and Jack Ryan were. In a scramble, it sure helps to hit your approach shots from 120 yards out rather than 150 yards. When we announced to everyone else our emergency-nine match (a desperate attempt to get even for the day on a nine-hole match defines “emergency nine” about perfectly), then the real action began.

While I ran to buy more golf balls, Huck Seed decided to bet \$1,000 a team on our side of the bet. Then Jeff Friedman bought Huck’s bet from him for \$1,000 (obviously, Jeff thought our team would win by more than one hole), and the game was on. Before long, we were playing for over \$6,000 a hole, with carryovers, so that if we tied all eight first holes, then the ninth would have been worth \$54,000. Now, the problem with a two-man scramble is this: who hits first and who hits second? I mean, when your partner shanks a ball into the desert out of play, can you step up under tremendous pressure and hit a safe shot onto the fairway or the green? Remember now, this isn’t poker we’re talking about here. We are all poker champs, but this is golf. This is the main reason that poker players love playing high-stakes golf. Can you hit the shot when you are under all that pressure? Can you make the six-foot straight-in putt to win \$12,000, or miss it and lose \$12,000? What are you really made of? Are you a champion like Jack Nicklaus or Tiger Woods, or a choker like a lot of other PGA golfers on the final day of a PGA tournament?

As we stood on the seventh tee during this match, Ralph asked

us to cancel the match—which to this point was even—or double our bet with him. Layne and I decided to double our already escalated bet to \$3,000 a team (it seemed as if the bets were also kicked up now with everyone else, to about \$10,000 a hole total), and now it was our turn to hit our tee shots. The distance to the hole on this par three was about 115 yards or so. Layne hit a shot that I thought was out of play. It was amazing then how heavy the club felt in my hands. My team needed me, Huck Seed (who was following the match) needed me, and Jeff Friedman needed me. If I messed up, then we would certainly lose this hole. As I stepped up to the ball, I just tried to focus myself on the task at hand, which was to hit the nine iron 115 yards and straight at the flag. The club still felt heavy to me, but I managed at least to hit it about 102 yards and knock it on the green. I thought, “Yes!”

When Layne and I walked down to our ball, we knew what putt we would have, because I had had the exact same putt earlier in the day. Now we had two chances to knock the 36-foot putt in, or at least leave it close so that we could make a par. We knew that Jack and Ralph would make a par (or better) from about 25 feet away, straight up the hill. But this was no ordinary 36-foot putt that Layne and I faced; in fact, it had about 10 feet of break in it, so that lagging this putt up there close to the hole involved a very high right-to-left trajectory. This was the kind of putt in which finding the right speed was of the utmost importance, if you wanted to leave it close to the hole. Layne hit a nice putt to about 8 feet past the hole, and now I knew, watching Layne’s shot, exactly what the putt would do. I had seen this putt three times already today! Unfortunately, I made the same mistake I had made that morning, and the same mistake that Layne had just made. I hit it 7 feet past the hole. This was a very bad result for the man who is supposed to be hitting the money shot. In other words, I blew it. Now Ralph and Jack knocked their putt to within a foot, and we had to concede their par to them. We needed to make our 7-footer just to halve the hole (tie).

Now that we were on the other side of this hole, our putt broke on a left-to-right trajectory about 10 inches, from just 7 feet or so.

Layne made another nice roll from 7 feet, but he just missed the putt on the high side. “Just make a good stroke,” I told myself. There really wasn’t too much pressure on me now, because no one expected me to make that putt anyway. No one, that is, except me. After stalking the putt for just over a minute, I pulled my putter back and stroked it as well as I could. The putt rolled right on trajectory toward the hole, and I yelled, “Gentlemen” (Yosh Nakano’s favorite golfing line), as I walked away smiling. Wait a minute, though. The putt broke extra-hard right at the end, still hit the hole fairly solidly, but didn’t drop. Oh well, no one ever said that golf is my game!

Appendix 2

AN ULTIMATEBET.COM HAND

The professional poker world has been turned upside down as a result of amateur players dominating the top prizes at poker's most prestigious tournaments. It's just amazing. Robert Varkonyi winning the World Series of Poker (WSOP) in 2002, amateur player Alan Goehring winning the \$25,000 buy-in World Poker Tour Championship in 2003, and Chris Moneymaker—he invested \$30 in an online poker tournament and parlayed that up to \$2.5 million—winning the 2003 WSOP.

The buzz on the street is “Anyone can win!” and “If Money-maker can do it, why can't I? I'll buy in for a hundred dollars and give it a shot.” This is drawing unprecedented numbers of players into online poker rooms. And some of these players are creating their own legends. Kingofding and TICKER (Erick Lindgren) are two players known to have made over \$1 million playing online poker.

While in Aruba playing in UltimateBet.com's World Poker Tour event, I made a few bad plays along the way, and found myself knocked out of the tournament on day two. Erick Lindgren, already

\$1 million ahead playing online poker, proved his mastery of online players one more time, and wound up winning the \$500,000 first-place prize. (By the way, in 2004, with a \$4 million prize pool guaranteed, along with a \$1 million first prize, UltimateBet.com (UB) is going to have the single biggest event ever held in Aruba.) With the thought of relaxing on my mind, I decided to play an actual online tournament while hanging out on the balcony of my hotel room—overlooking the beach—with a Rum Punch in my hand.

It was the Sunday \$200 buy-in no-limit Hold'em tournament, and UB had 500 players. The total purse was \$100,000, with a first-place prize of \$24,000. When I saw the prize pool posted, I thought, "Wow, I can really win something for my \$200 investment." With 55 players remaining, the following hand came up between "philhellmuth" (me) and "Krazykunuk" (James Worth) who is an excellent tournament player. The blinds were \$500–\$1,000, everyone folded to James on the button, and James opened for \$3,000 of his \$15,000 total. I was in the big blind with Qh-9h and \$18,000 total.

I was thinking, "OK, perhaps James is trying to steal the blind with a weak hand, but he knows that it is philhellmuth in the big blind *and* usually players have a real hand when they raise my blind." Thus I liked folding as the best option, or moving all-in as my second-best option, with calling the bet as the worst. Why call and get yourself in trouble somehow? If James is raising with, say, Q-10, then I would go broke with some flops. In that case, folding would be a great option, but moving all-in would probably win the money. Somehow, however, my thinking got double-crossed, and I decided to call the bet.

The flop came down 9d-7c-6s, and I decided that there was a high probability that I had the best hand. I was thinking, "OK, if I check, and he checks, and now a card higher than an eight comes off, then I'll be forced to play my hand, even though I potentially let James hit that higher card for free. Thus, I should bet out something that would prevent James from calling with say, K-J, but not enough to scare him away if he has a pair. I would love to bet out small, and have him move in on me with nothing, or with a pair that I could beat."

So I bet out \$3,500, hoping for a raise from James. In fact, James did raise all-in, and I called him quickly. James showed me 10-8, which made a straight on the flop. When a two and a jack came off the next two cards, James won the \$30,500 pot, and I was left with \$3,000. I thought, “Phil, you dummy, you knew calling before the flop was the worst option! You let him hit his hand, and then paid him off. Moving all-in would have worked because there is no way he would have called with 10-8.”

Oh well, how bad could it be? I was in Aruba; I had a nice view of the beach, a lot of my friends close by, and a Rum Punch in my hand.

Appendix 3

CHAMPION OF THE YEAR AWARD

To qualify for the “Phil Hellmuth” Champion of the Year (COTY) Award, you need to make it to the final table at any U.S. tournament with at least a \$2,000 buy-in with a minimum of 65 entries. In addition, all World Series of Poker events count, and all World Poker Tour events count. Points will be awarded in order of finish—200, 180, 160, 140, 120, 100, 80, 60, and 40 points. The WSOP main event stands in a class alone and will have a multiplier of 3, the WPT \$25,000 event will have a 2.5 multiplier, all other \$10,000 events will be multiplied by 2, and the \$5,000–\$9,999 buy-in events will have a 1.5 multiplier.

If you want to win the Champion of the Year Award in any year, you will need to play against the best poker players in the world, in the biggest and most prestigious events, and finish at least at the final table (or in the “final four,” if you want to win the really big points). Special thanks to Kenneth Popkin for managing the COTY Award and keeping it up to date with a spreadsheet.

What a sprint to the finish we witnessed in 2003. Going into the

last qualifying event of the year—the Bellagio’s Five Diamond World Poker Classic \$10,000 buy-in championship event—a total of 13 players were in the points to win the Champion of the Year Award. I controlled my own destiny, having the lead at 1,070 points, and believe me: I don’t have any problem with winning my own award! (However, I didn’t make it past day one.)

With 50 players left (we started with 310), Erik Seidel was in the best position to take the crown with 1,005 points; in addition, he had chips, and momentum was on his side. Erik had managed to finish seventh and then first in the previous two events he played in—the \$2,500 limit Hold’em event on Thursday and Friday, and the \$2,500 pot-limit Omaha event on Saturday and Sunday. On Monday, we began the four-day-long championship event, and one of the chip leaders after day one was, not surprisingly, Erik. I believed in him, and I was going to bet on him to finish first or second in this last key event, but Erik himself told me on day three, “Don’t bet on me. . . .” Uh, OK. . . .

Chip Jett was in third place on the COTY list going into day three, and he needed an eighth-place or better finish to pass me, but he still had to worry about Seidel, Amir Vahedi (who needed first or second place to win the award), Daniel Negreanu (who needed first place), and Mel Judah (who needed first place).

So there I sat at the Bellagio on day three, watching all of these great players have a go at passing me up. Negreanu went out early, and Seidel was eliminated 19th. When Amir finished in 14th place, only three players had a chance to win the COTY: me, Chip, and Mel. As time passed by, Chip and Mel made the final table. Just one more place to go for Chip—and eight for Mel—but of course, they were both focused on the \$1.1 million first-place prize. When one more player was eliminated, Chip did it! He made the final eight—actually finishing eighth—to take the lead.

After Chip finished eighth, Mel Judah needed to finish in first place to win the COTY. About then, Mel asked me, “Phil, do international events count?”

I replied, “Only WPT international events.”

Mel answered, “That’s too bad, because I made three other big-money buy-in final tables this year.”

Nice job anyway, Mel, but they don’t count for the COTY.

With six players left in Bellagio’s \$10,000 buy-in WPT event, we broke for the day, and Mel Judah was still alive and kicking. We would have to wait for day four—the last day of the last qualifying event—to determine who would win the COTY for 2003.

The next day, when Mel finished in sixth place, I was finally able to announce the winner: “Chip Jett wins Phil Hellmuth’s Champion of the Year Award in 2003!” Let’s give Chip Jett some praise: he made seven final tables in poker’s toughest and most prestigious events in 2003, and took home over \$700,000 in prize money.

Other players who had a good chance to win the COTY this year were Phil Ivey (who led it most of 2003), Men “The Master” Nguyen, Toto Leonidas (who made a late charge), Chris “Jesus” Ferguson (who had a terrific WSOP), Howard Lederer, and T. J. Cloutier. “One-word names” like Negreanu, Flack, Gus, Chan, and Devilfish are a few of the other top 20 finishers. The 20th- through 30th-place finishers include four World Champions (Huck, Carlos, Scotty, and Dan Harrington), Juanda (21st), and Alan Cunningham. By the way, John Juanda won the COTY in 2002. For a list of the top 100 finishers in 2003’s COTY, or the current standings, go to www.philhellmuth.com.

Look at the number of great players who made the top 30 in 2003! To me, it shows the amount of skill that it takes to play in the biggest events in poker each year. With the numbers of entries way up in all of the COTY events, we still have all of these great players near the top of the list.

Appendix 4

MY TOP MOMENTS IN POKER

1. 1989 World Champion of Poker (World Series of Poker's Big One)
2. Nine World Series of Poker wins (tied number one with Johnny Chan and Doyle Brunson)
3. Number one on the WSOP all-time money list with over \$3.5 million (until the 2004 WSOP winner landed \$5 million for first)
4. 1995 Hall of Fame Poker Classic Champion
5. Four additional Hall of Fame Classic wins (number one with five Hall of Fame Classic wins)
6. 1988 Bicycle Club Championship event winner
7. 2000 Poker EM winner (the European Poker Championships, Vienna)
8. 2000 Late Night Poker III winner (Cardiff, Wales)
9. 1996 voted Best Poker Tournament Player in the World by poker peers

10. Published and sold more than 100,000 copies of *Play Poker Like the Pros* (2003) in the first year
11. Honorary speaker at Oxford University in 2003
12. Bascom Hill Society member (University of Wisconsin)
13. Winning at least thirty poker tournaments worldwide
14. *The Madison Kid* screenplay optioned by Beacon Pictures
15. Representing UltimateBet.com
16. Representing Edge Television Gaming Network
17. Front-page article in the *New York Times*
18. First person to do a live Internet broadcast of a poker tournament (1999 WSOP) at philhellmuth.com
19. Produced *Phil Hellmuth's Million Dollar Poker System* poker strategy DVDs, part of the Masters of a Poker series
20. Representing Summus wireless and their Texas Hold'em game for cell phones
21. Produced the premium-quality "Phil Hellmuth" chip set
22. Won more major Hold'em Tournament than anyone else since 1988

MY WSOP WINS

- | | |
|------|---|
| 1989 | \$10,000 buy-in no-limit Hold'em main event |
| 1992 | \$5,000 limit Hold'em champion |
| 1993 | \$1,500 preliminary no-limit Hold'em |
| 1993 | \$3,000 preliminary no-limit Hold'em |
| 1993 | \$5,000 limit Hold'em champion |
| 1997 | \$3,000 pot-limit Hold'em |
| 2001 | \$3,000 preliminary no-limit Hold'em |
| 2003 | \$2,500 preliminary limit Hold'em |
| 2003 | \$3,000 preliminary no-limit Hold'em |

Appendix 5

THE NEXT POKER WAVE

First we had Texas Hold'em, which required that you play the game with a deck of cards, a table, and of course, chips. Next we had Internet Hold'em, which allowed you to play poker in the comfort of your own home. Then we had wireless modems that hooked up to your laptop, and allowed you to play Hold'em in limousines (Erick Lindgren and I played from Atlantic City to Manhattan one Saturday night—we both won over \$4,000!), in airports and grocery stores (Annie Duke), while driving from Vegas to L.A. (Russ Hamilton), and everywhere and anywhere in the U.S.A. Still, as cool as it is to play in a limo or taxi, you needed a laptop. Now we can play Texas Hold'em directly on a cell phone! Bring your cell and play anytime, anywhere!

Welcome to the future of Texas Hold'em: “Phil Hellmuth’s Texas Hold'em Powered by Bluefuel.” A brand-new App by Summus Cellular Applications allows us to play poker on a standard cell phone face, and it is “scary good.” There are two different ways to play the game, one by text only and the other with full graphics—using a

small poker table. If you're busy or using the phone (hopefully *not* while driving), the cell beeps when it is your turn to act, so that you don't have to watch every hand from beginning to end. On the other hand, watching every hand does teach you something about the players, and their styles of play. In any case, I prefer the graphic version.

While my wife and I drove my son to a basketball playoff game for NJB (National Junior Basketball), I sat in the passenger seat playing cell phone Hold'em, when the following hand came up. We were playing 5-10 blind Pot Limit Hold'em, with a 2000 "chip" buy-in. I was down to 1,860 in chips and noticed that it was impossible to bluff these players. You see, I had just bluffed 200 chips into 3d-7s-9d-Kd-7c, and been called by my opponent with his ace-high. I thought to myself, "OK, if they're going to call my big bets with nothing, then I'll wait for a strong hand and bet it big."

About 15 minutes later I had 4-4, and six players took the flop with me. The flop was a beautiful-looking 2d-3h-4c, and I bet out a pot-sized 70-chip bet. I was called by two players. The next card was the Qh, and I bet out 280 chips, again a pot-sized bet. This time I was called by only one opponent. When the last card was a harmless 10c, I then bet out 600 chips (there were 840 in the pot), and I was called again. Although I didn't see my opponent's hand, the chips were instantly put into my cell stack, and I felt as if I had played the hand perfectly.

Normally I would bet less on the flop to try to lure players into the pot, and typically I would bet less on the turn as well, but not too much less since I would have to protect my hand against a straight draw. Finally, I would usually bet more like 400 on the end to induce an easier call from my opponent. The moral of this story is, if your opponents are going to call your big bets with weak hands, then charge them the maximum when you do have a strong hand. I'll see you soon out in the virtual cell phone world!

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E-Book Extra

Phil at the Tables...

- Comes in second to champ Greg Raymers (\$5,000,000) in the all-time World Series of Poker money list with \$3.6 million.
- Won his first World Series of Poker title in 1989 at the tender age of twenty-four.
- Has scored an additional eight WSOP bracelets since then, and that's some serious, serious hardware.
- Ranks number one in Hall of Fame Poker Tournament, with five wins.

- Has dozens of major tournament wins from all over the world, including the World's Biggest Seven-card Stud tournament in Austria, and Late Night Poker in Great Britain.
- Was voted best all-around tournament poker player in the world by his peers in 1996.
- Has five World Poker Tour top-ten finishes.
- Has the career goal of becoming the best poker player of all time...and he's well on his way!

E-Book Extra

Stories from the Tables of the 2004 World Series of Poker

With 2,600 players (Hallelujah!) entering this year's WSOP, it wasn't easy to navigate through the field. In fact, I explain it to the press like this: imagine 2,600 players in a room flipping coins; 1,300 flip heads and move on. Eventually, three will flip heads ten times in a row. Good luck trying to beat the guy that has ten coin flips in a row go his way!

Almost every great "known" player fell somewhere along the way at the 2004 World Series of Poker (WSOP) final table. These are a few of their stories.

Erik Seidel

Erik Seidel found himself down to \$9,000 on Day 4 after not picking up a hand or a pot for a long time. "Obviously I was looking for a

hand before then.” Erik had just been high-carded to the TV table, where, at his fourth hand, he was on the button—and Gus Hansen had played all three previous hands. Gus limped, everyone else folded, and it came around to Erik with the blinds at \$1,000-\$2,000 and the antes at \$300 a man. Erik was pretty happy with his K-8 and thought he had Gus beat.

So Erik moved all-in for \$9,000, and the big blind now made it \$25,000 to go. “Right then I knew I was dead, because this fellow wasn’t an action player.” Gus folded, and the big blind showed Erik A-K, and in an instant it was over for him. I also went broke with K-8, but after the flop came down 10-8-4, I was in the small blind with a very short stack, and the button had limped with Q-10. (Yes, that #**#\$ Q-10 busted me again.)

Annie Duke

Annie Duke went out late on Day 3 when she called a moderate raise in the big blind with K-Q. The small blind called in front of her and the flop came down 4-5-6, followed by check, her check, and the raiser’s check. The next card was a 5, and Annie bluffed all-in for \$28,000 into the \$14,000 pot. The original raiser studied for a long while—while Annie sweated it out—and folded. The small blind player then began to study Annie and finally made a great call on her with A-Q high. Annie says of it now, “I don’t know why the internet always writes these hands up wrong! It was really just a random pot, and a random move that I made. Not some \$100,000 bluff or anything spectacular like that. At the time, I was short stack, and I went for it.

“By the way, I would never move in on the river there because it would look like I was trying to pick up the pot. Whereas on the turn it looked like I may have checked a strong flop trying to trap the raiser on my left, I really was protecting my hand by moving in. I just wasn’t going to limp into Day 4 with a mere \$28,000; it was a

high-percentage bluff. The raiser studied me for a long time, and I was very surprised that I was called here by the small blind, but kudos to him for making a tough call.”

Russ Hamilton

World Champion of Poker Russ Hamilton went out about 135th. “I just couldn’t accumulate any chips, every move I made, they came over the top of me, and the blinds and antes just kept going up. Finally I was down to \$52,000 or so, with \$1,600-\$3,200 blinds with a \$400 per person ante. I moved all-in over the top of a \$9,000 bet with my A-Q, and the original raiser called me quickly with his Q-Q. There was no hesitation on his part, as we both were in late position.” A few seconds later it was over for Russ.

Russ explained, “Earlier I played a big pot when I made it \$2,000 to go with my K-K, and a person I knew well made it \$7,000 to go behind me. I knew he had a big hand, but the possibilities in my mind were J-J, Q-Q, A-K, or A-A. But since I knew him well, I decided to just call and get a good read, and perhaps even trap him with my kings. The flop came down 8-8-6, and I checked. He bet \$9,000. So at this point, I know he doesn’t have A-K, and based on his style, it must be A-A, Q-Q, or J-J. Thus I called the \$9,000. The next card was a blank 4, so I checked and he checked. Now I know that I have him. Even if an ace comes on the end, I’m going to bet it. My only fear was a queen or a jack on the end. Now a queen comes down on the river, and he sat up in his chair, and that scared me, so I checked to him, and he bet \$20,000.

“I looked at him, and then I looked with disbelief at the dealer, and I just knew that he had pocket queens. It took me four minutes to make a decision, and along the way I said to him, ‘Spencer, pocket queens, huh?’ Finally I showed the pocket kings and folded, and he then showed me the pocket queens, but what a pot to lose this early! I would have had a ton of chips at this early stage, with the blinds at \$300-\$600, and then I could have really played some poker!” Tough beat, Russ, but one heck of a lay down!

Antonio Esfandiari

Antonio “the Magician” Esfandiari went out early on Day 1. “The fourth hand of the tournament, with the blinds \$25-\$50, I picked up J-J, and made it \$150 to go. The small blind called, and the flop came down A-J-4 with two spades, and I bet out \$450. He calls, and the turn was the 9d, so I bet \$1,200. He calls, and at this point in time I put him on an ace. The river made a spade flush possible, and he checked, and I went with my read and bet \$2,800. He then moved all-in, and I was forced to fold. He didn’t show the hand, but I didn’t need to see it—later he told me that he had a flush! The hand I went out with is irrelevant, because I was already a short stack.” Sounds like a great lay down with the three jacks, and it sucks to lose so much so early in the big one.

Howard Lederer

When I reached Howard Lederer (“Bub” to his friends), he had just won \$9.3 million playing heads-up poker at the Bellagio on the sixth day of the WSOP’s big one in a \$100,000-\$200,000 match. As a side note, Jennifer Harmon Traniello and Todd Brunson have also done well playing heads-up for those kinds of stakes.

Howard was eliminated around 400th place by someone who is no stranger to anyone in the poker world today. “It was very strange, I happened to get high-carded to the TV table alongside Doyle[Brunson]; when the TV table went to eight handed, and I happened to be in the big blind and nearest to the TV table. My tournament had been pretty uneventful. I ended Day 1 with \$13,000, and then I was up to \$50,000 making steady progress. I bluffed a bit too much, found myself at \$10,000 or so, and when I moved to Doyle’s table I had roughly \$30,000.

“And then I flopped a pair, stole a pot or two, and had \$45,000 when the big hand came up between Doyle and me. By the way, this hand will definitely be on TV. Though some might think Doyle’s play was odd, I happen to like the way he played this hand. He

opened in middle position for \$3,500 with Ks-10s, and everyone folded to me in the big blind. I looked down at 7-7, and called \$2,500 more. Now there's about \$8,000 in the pot, and the flop comes down 7s-4s-3d, and I check. I was already debating in my mind how to play this powerful hand—was I going to check-call, check-raise, and if check-raise, how much—when Doyle announced, 'I'm all-in.' Decision time over, I nearly beat Doyle into the pot; the second he said 'All-in,' I said 'call.'

"Then Doyle said, 'Uh-oh.' He knew by the speed of my call that I had a super-strong hand. The Kc came on the turn, which meant that we would have played a big pot anyway. Then the 6s comes on the river, and boom, I'm gone. The agony of defeat! I mean one second you're comfortable and playing in the biggest poker tournament in history, and the next second you're gone. The finality of it all is really something. As I said before, I like Doyle's play here. I mean if he bets \$8,000, what's he supposed to do? Fold for my all-in \$30,000 raise? He can't, so why not put the maximum pressure on me and any pair that I might have (like J-J, 10-10, 9-9 or something similar)?"

Doyle Brunson

Since I couldn't reach Doyle by my article deadline, Howard told me the unbelievable scenario behind Doyle's exit at 53rd place. According to Howard, "I was needling Doyle the next day after he busted me about his verbal declarations. I was telling him that he was too lazy to put his chips in the pot. Unbelievably, Day 5 rolls along, and the following hand came up between Bradley Berman (Lyle Berman's son) and Doyle: Doyle was down to about \$100,000 in chips, with the blinds at about \$6,000-\$12,000. In mid-position, Doyle verbally announced, 'I'm all-in,' but it was super loud in the building at the time, and everyone folded around to Bradley who was in the small blind.

"Bradley thought that everyone else had folded, and that he was raising the big blind only. So Bradley announced, 'I raise,' at which

point he was told that Doyle had already moved all-in and that he must raise Doyle's \$100,000 bet. The big blind then folded, and Doyle flipped up pocket tens. Bradley, with a little egg-white on his face, sheepishly flipped up his A-7. Bradley flopped an ace with an A-5-5 flop, and it was over for Doyle in an instant.

"Can you imagine if Doyle would have made it to the final table? At 70 years of age, and moving like a surgeon through 2,600 players! What a feat that would be."

Howard's final comments on the 2004 WSOP were, "Next year the pros will play even better against the amateurs. It is a learning curve for all of us, and we will be even better prepared by next year. Some of us try too many moves against the amateurs rather than just playing them straight up."

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E-Book Extra

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Poker Quiz

Welcome to Quiz 1

Note: my book Play Poker Like the Pros is available right now through this site.

The following questions are meant to provide insight into "Phil's way" to play in a limit hold'em tournament.

Assume:

- * There are 24 players left in a limit hold'em tournament
- * You have eight players at your table
- * You have 12,000 chips
- * The blinds are \$300-\$600

Begin

Poker Quiz

Question 1 / 7

What do you do with A-Q off suit when it is two bets to you from an early position raiser and you're on the button?

- A) Fold
- B) Re-raise (making it 3 bets)
- C) Call 2 bets

[Next](#)

Poker Quiz

Answer 1 / 7

Phil's Answer is: B

I like being aggressive with A-Q in limit Hold'em tournaments. A-Q beats a lot of hands that players wil raise with in limit Hold'em tourneys, and is only in bad shape to A-K, A-A, K-K, and Q-Q. Re-raising puts the heat on the original raiser, and gets rid of the marginal hands that may call two bets behind you. My least favorite option is calling two bets; I would prefer folding over calling.

Next

Poker Quiz

Question 2 / 7

What do you do with A-9 suited when it is two bets to you from early position and you're on the button?

- A) Fold
- B) Re-raise (three bets)
- C) Call

[Next](#)

Poker Quiz

Answer 2 / 7

Phil's Answer is: A

I like folding here. The difference between A-9 suited and A-Q off suit is huge. A-9 isn't in my top ten hands list, and A-Q is. Why get involved with something this weak late in a tourney? Just fold and wait for a better spot, I do like re-raising more than calling, as it is a nice aggressive move that puts heat on the original raiser.

[Next](#)

Poker Quiz

Question 3 / 7

What do you do with 2-2 in third position when the first position has raised in front of you?

- A) Fold
- B) Re-raise
- C) Call

Next

Poker Quiz

Answer 3 / 7

Phil's Answer is: A

I like folding here. Why get involved with a hand which is an underdog to almost any other hand in hold'em? I think that re-raising isn't a bad option here either, as you enter the hand from a position of strength with a three-bet. You may pick up the pot when it comes down A-9-4, and the original raiser has K-Q or something similar. However, re-raising is preferred early in the tournament, not late like in this example.

Next

Poker Quiz

Question 4 / 7

What do you do with A-A in the big blind (BB) when someone in late position raises and everyone else folds?

- A) Fold
- B) Re-raise
- C) Smooth Call

Next

Poker Quiz

Answer 4 / 7

Phil's Answer is: C

I like to just call in order to lure my opponent into undervaluing my hand. By smooth calling with A-A here, you're sending out the signal that you're weak or could have anything before the flop.

[Next](#)

Poker Quiz

Question 5 / 7

What do you do with A-A in the big blind when someone in late position has raised, and then another player calls?

- A) Fold
- B) Re-raise
- C) Smooth Call

[Next](#)

Poker Quiz

Answer 5 / 7

Phil's Answer is: B

I like re-raising here and capturing one extra bet each from my opponents pre-flop. Smooth calling here is OK as well, but I would re-raise; it may be the case that your opponent has a hand like K-K or Q-Q whereby he will cap it with you pre-flop. What happens if she does have a super strong hand like this and you just call, and then an A flops or a J-J or 10-10 flop comes? You don't get much action is what happens here!

Next

Poker Quiz

Question 6 / 7

What do you do with 8-8 when someone in early position raises and then another player re-raises, and you're on the button?

- A) Fold
- B) Re-raise
- C) Call

[Next](#)

Poker Quiz

Answer 6 / 7

Phil's Answer is: A

I like folding here. Why put in 15 percent of your chips before the flop when it is likely that you're beat? Why not just fold and wait for a better spot? What if one of them has 7-7 and the other A-K, well too bad! If you do want to play the 8-8, then make it four bets to go and you might even drive out the original raiser. Late in a tourney, be cautious! Like I say in my new book, Bring your big guns (A-A, K-K, A-K, Q-Q) to the big wars!

[Next](#)

Poker Quiz

Question 7 / 7

What do you do with Kc-Qc when someone in an early position raises and you're one off of the button?

- A) Fold
- B) Re-raise
- C) Call

Next

Poker Quiz

Answer 7 / 7

Phil's Answer is: A

I'm looking to fold this hand in this spot. Why get involved with K-Q this late in the tourney? If the original raiser has any kind of hand, then you're in trouble with K-Q. I do like calling here better than re-raising in this spot thought—for once.

All done!

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About the Author

Phil Hellmuth Jr., voted the “Best Poker Tournament Player in the World” in 1997 by his peers, is a nine-time World Series of Poker Champion and a WSOP leading money winner. His first book, *Play Poker Like the Pros*, was released in 2003 and has quickly become the essential text for mastering poker. A contributor to *Gambling Times* magazine and *Card Player*, he lives with his family in Northern California.

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