

ANTE UP

FLORIDA GAMING MAGAZINE™

FLORIDA NEWS
PAR & POKER CHARITY

HEALTHY BET
HELP YOUR MIND RELAX

PRO CORNER
LEE CHILDS, JOE NAVARRO

WANNA CHOP?
HOW TO MAKE THE BEST DEAL

**SPECIAL
REPORT**

**FLORIDA
GAMING
SUMMIT**

PG. 25



JASON MERCIER
THE YOUNG POKER PRO FROM DAVIE HAS BEEN LIGHTING UP THE POKER WORLD

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We gambled when we quit good jobs to bring the state of Florida its very own poker magazine. We gambled that the rise in poker's popularity in this state would continue. We gambled that the state, albeit slowly, would continue to improve the gambling environment here.

And that gamble, and those made by our friends around the state every day, were on display recently at the BNP Media's fourth annual Florida Gaming Summit at the Seminole Hard Rock in Hollywood.

We provide expansive coverage of the summit this month on pages 25-30. We're sure you'll find, as we did, the issues and discourse were fascinating.

The summit attracts gambling operators, analysts and others from the state and country to dissect the current state of Florida's gambling industry. No doubt, it's an interesting time in history.

• The Seminole Compact: Will blackjack stay? Go? Spread? No one really knows.

• Slot Machines: Will Dade County parimutuels have more success than their Broward friends? Will parimutuels elsewhere in the state ever get even video lottery terminals? No one really knows.

• The Economy: How long will the malaise last? Can the new administration fix it? No one really knows.

No one really knows. Sounds like we're all gambling.

But we at *Ante Up* are still happy with our gamble. We believe everyone in the state is still happy with their gamble. Trying times? Sure. An uncertain future? No doubt. But these are the times that separate "calculated risk-takers" from the gamblers.

You keep on doing what you do, only better. You keep on innovating, only faster.

"Face it, we're hooked," John James, chief operating officer of Seminole Gaming, said to open the summit. "We love the action. We love the people. We love the technology. We thrive on the ever-changing environment."

So do we, John. Together, we can make sure that environment changes for the better.

— Christopher Cosenza and Scott Long
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NEWS



Freerolling to Mexico

The WDAE Poker Club kicked off with a very successful tournament at Tampa Bay Downs' Silks Poker Room in Tampa, and its winner is off to Mexico. **10**

♠ Also, the Silks secured the poker portion of the Par and Poker Celebrity charity event during Super Bowl week in Tampa. **11**

Ladies first ... well, one lady

The Dan LeBatard poker event at Dania Jai-Alai saw its first female winner. **6**

Why home games are a risk

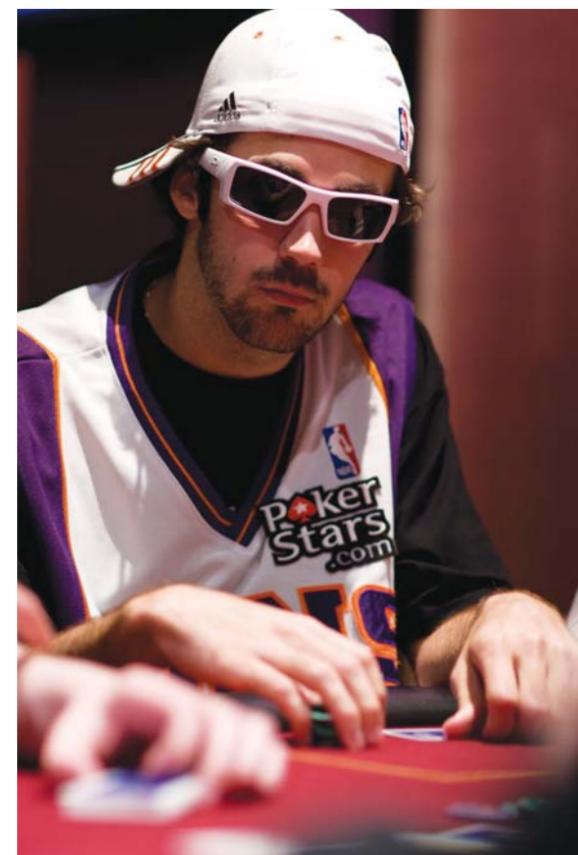
Everybody does it, right? That doesn't make home games legal. We dive into what's legal and what's not in Florida. **13**



Oh Captain, my Captain!

Why (and how) is it that One-Eyed Jacks poker room manager Sam Minutello is drinking champagne from the prestigious Ryder Cup? **12**

COVER STORY



Mercier photo courtesy of PokerStars and Neil Stoddart

Who needs the NBA?

Davie's Jason Mercier once had aspirations of playing in the NBA (well, when he was 12 years old), but he quickly found fortune and fame in poker. **20-23**

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A troika of choices in Miami

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700 channels and nothing on

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ON THE BUTTON



Poof!

Antonio "The Magician" Esfandiari spends some time with *Ante Up* and lets you in on a few secrets, such as what it's like to lose a bet to Phil Laak and where the best place is to party in Las Vegas. **44**

MCKINNEY FIRST FEMALE WINNER OF LEBATARD EVENT



Dania's "Play Your Way" winners for October

1. Jonathan Clough
2. Gene Midyette
3. Marina Kolesnitchenso
4. Steve Kaplan
5. Bob Mendola
6. Alexander Todini
7. Craig Crosby
8. Emilio Mendillo
9. Larry DeSena
10. Oscar Gabbidon

For the first time, a woman won the Dan LeBatard Celebrity Poker Tournament at Dania Jai-Alai on Dania Beach. The Oct. 22 event had nearly 300 participants and included arguably the world's greatest American jai-alai player, Joey Cornblit.

But, at almost 11:30 p.m., the big moment came for Pembroke Pines resident Elizabeth McKinney when she flopped fives full of sevens to take the biggest pot of the night, not only assuring her a seat at the final table, but giving her the tournament trophy.

"I was so nervous after I won that pot that my hands were shaking," she said, as she posed for a post-tournament picture with 790 The Ticket's host Dan LeBatard, who also works for ESPN.

Being the obvious chipleader, she agreed to chop with the other nine players at the final table. McKinney was happy with the \$1,077 payout, which all 10 players received.

"In poker, you never can tell how things will turn out and I could lose this big stack just as fast as I got it. I'm thrilled; nothing like this has ever happened," she said.



McKinney and LeBatard



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Clockwise from bottom left: Bruce Kaufman, David Levy, Souv Adan Phouthavong and Rickie Baboolal.

Seminole Coconut Creek bad beat jackpot reaches \$173K before finally being hit Oct. 19

For weeks the bad beat jackpot at Seminole Coconut Creek had been in the news, steadily building and drawing players from all over the state. When it reached \$173K the bad beat poker gods decided it was time to pay out.

David Levy may have lost the pot with his quad deuces, but he won the most money. He took home \$86,621 when his four deuces ran into Souv Adan Phouthavong's quad queens at the \$5-\$10 no-limit hold'em table.

Phouthavong pocketed \$51,972 and the rest of the table shared the remaining \$34,648. The hand was dealt at 9:20 a.m. Oct. 19.

But the story doesn't end there. Later in the day, around 5 p.m., the bad beat was hit again. After weeks of no one hitting this monster jackpot two bad beats were dealt inside eight hours of each other.

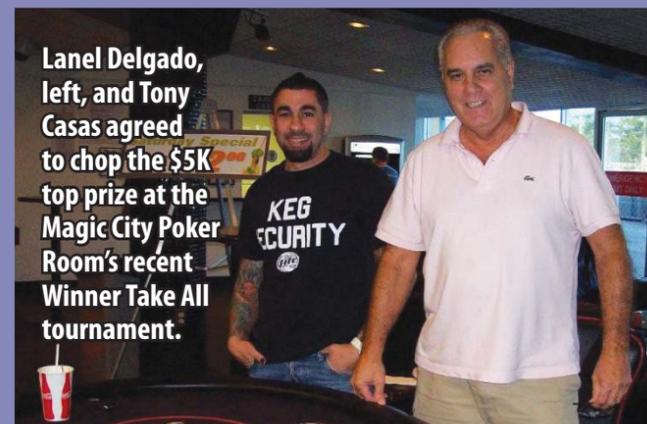
This time the losing hand (aces full of jacks) was held by Rickie Baboolal. He took home \$48,792 because Bruce Kaufman held four jacks. Kaufman won \$29,280 and the table share was \$19,512.

All told, the bad beats paid out more than \$270K that day.

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- The top 50 point earners play in the championship on December 7th

Flagler Greyhound Track



Lanel Delgado, left, and Tony Casas agreed to chop the \$5K top prize at the Magic City Poker Room's recent Winner Take All tournament.



Ileana Ricart and Brigitte Badell flank Yakima Palmero, who won the Ladies Tournament. Ricart finished second and Badell was third.

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Christine, a dealer at Dania Jai-Alai, really got into the spirit of Halloween by dressing up as a police officer for her Oct. 31 shift.



Israel Borjas from West Palm Beach poses with his winning cards after capturing the WPT Foxwoods satellite Oct. 25 aboard the Palm Beach Princess. Good luck in April!



Miami Jai-Alai's Crystal Card Room has paid more than \$300,000 in jackpots since they began in August 2007. Here are three of its recent winners, Michael, Evans and Adrianna.



Here are a couple of happy Southeast Hold'em players.

Orlando monthly winners for Southeast Hold'em are Ismael Fernandez, Lamont Clegg, Kathy Schnitzer, David Bass, Mike Norman, Jason Ryan, Monica Swearingen, Edward Gonye, Larry Kenny Jr. and Debby Kubis. Recent Jacksonville winners include Chris Weed, Earnest Maiden, Ashley Montoleone, Josh Cohen, Missy Coker, Ryan Monroe, Gerald Butler, Adey Mason, Phil Brock and Matthew Maloney.

PLAYER PROFILE

An occasional interview with a professional poker player from Florida • By Chris Cosenza

Meet ... John Racener

Age: He turns 23 this month.

Nickname: Spikey, though he goes by JMONEY in some circles.

Hometown: He lives in the Channelside area of Tampa ("Just having fun at a young age," he says), though he went to school at Ridgewood High in New Port Richey and played baseball for the Rams.

Where he plays poker: Mainly online at PokerStars (screen name on Stars is \$30K and he once won the site's \$500K guaranteed tournament), though he has accounts on all the major sites. He cashed in one of the recent WCOOP second-chance events for \$11K and he played in September's Pros vs. Joes H.O.R.S.E. event at One-Eyed Jacks in Sarasota. "I've been getting into H.O.R.S.E. lately" he said. "So I thought I'd go down there and give it a shot."

Favorite game: He's by no means a no-limit hold'em specialist. He loves pot-limit Omaha. Racener made the final table at this year's World Series of Poker's \$2,500 Omaha-Stud/8 event and as numerous PLO cashes in major events. With three cashes each in the WSOP and World Poker Tour, the self-taught poker pro has amassed more than \$1 million in live tournament winnings, and that's just since December 2006.

Favorite hold'em hand: 5♠ 5♣

How long has he been playing? He says he started playing online when he was 17 or 18, though he officially turned pro on his 21st birthday. And what a birthday that was. When asked what his fa-

vorite moment in his career is, here's what he had to say "On my 21st birthday that was Day 1 of the WSOP \$5K circuit event at Harrah's (in Atlantic City). I ended up winning it. ... well, I did a three-way chop (for \$103K), and then the next year I won the same tournament in a three-way chop again on my birthday (for \$379K). Basically everyone tells me I should just go to that tournament once a year. (laughing) I'd be up \$300K a year, and be set. 'Stay home, go to the beach and then go out to that tournament every year,' that's what they say."



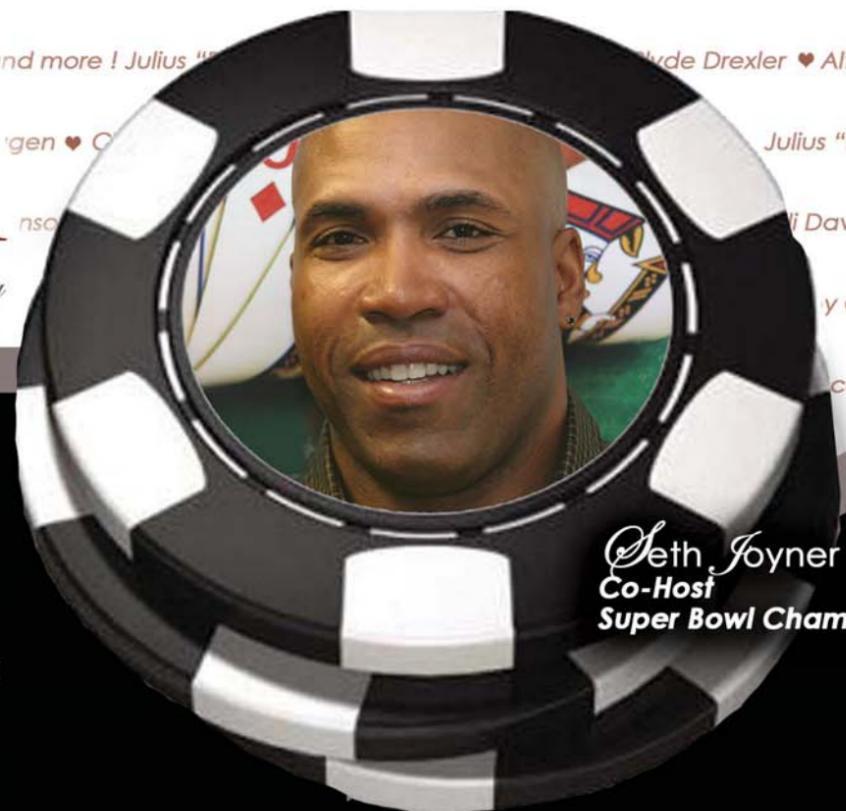
How he feels about Florida's restrictive limits: "I hate it so much. They moved up to the higher limits at Hard Rock at one point and I happened to be in Vegas at the time for two weeks. So that really sucked. I heard it was really good, like \$10-\$25 no-limit or whatever. But I go up there now and it's just boring. I go there and it's just a social thing, like maybe get a drink before you go out or something. It's not even competitive or anything in my opinion. ... Then again, if you go out to Vegas, it could get dangerous. You could lose a lot of money within a year's span and then be back home. So right now I'm just hanging around here and just traveling around the circuit to WPT events, and stuff."

More on Florida poker: "I don't understand why they don't have \$5-\$10 NL and stuff. I think they should have \$5-\$10... nothing big like \$1,500 no-limit, nothing like that because I don't think it will draw big enough, but maybe \$5-\$10 no-limit with a \$1,000 max buy-in, which is standard. That's how it is online and that'd be good. Nobody would get hurt."

Julius "Dr. J" Erving ♦ Lawrence Taylor ♣ Clyde Drexler ♥ Alfonso Ribiero ♠ Roy Green ♦ Ed Moses ♣ Bret Saberhagen

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Señor Bell and his winning cards.

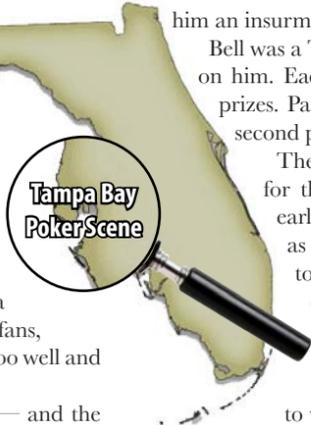
Players from the WDAE Poker Club and WPTAPL flocked to the Silks Poker Room for the Going All-In to Mexico freeroll.

WDAE POKER CLUB GETS OFF TO A GREAT START

To help launch the WDAE-AM 620 Poker Club, Tampa Bay Downs and the local chapter of the WPTAPL got together and held a freeroll on Oct. 26 at the Silks Poker Room in Tampa. The tournament, dubbed Going All-in to Mexico, drew about 140 players and was deemed a success by WDAE's Jeff Liss, who started the club.

"I think it's going over well," Liss said during a break in the action. "We came up with the idea just knowing WDAE really wanted to talk to poker players. We do a great job of talking to football fans, baseball fans, hockey fans, and poker is a great sport and was one we weren't serving too well and thought this was a great way to do it."

David "Fingers" Bell essentially won the tournament — and the trip to Mexico — when his two queens held up vs. AJ offsuit to gave



him an insurmountable chip lead.

Bell was a Team 620 player, which meant there was a bounty on him. Each table had Team 620 players with bounties as prizes. Pam Cohn from Dunedin, a WPTAPL player, took second place and won \$500.

The tournament drew a lot of players to a poker room for the first time, and many who were knocked out early signed up for other tournaments or cash games as they waited for their friends. It was WDAE's fifth tournament and its next event is planned for the first quarter of 2009.

Some content for the WDAE Poker Club's Web site is provided by *Ante Up* and the *Ante Up Magazine* Poker Podcast. To view the site go to www.620wdae.com and click on the POKER link at the top of the page.

Waggoner wins October's Battle of the Bay

Ever wonder which poker rooms have the best players? What about poker rooms that are in the same vicinity?

Well, Lucky's Card Room at Tampa Greyhound Track and One-Eyed Jacks at Sarasota Kennel Club have a way to settle the score: The Battle of the Bay. Each month the two rooms take their top 20 from the Player of the Month standings and pit them in a 40-player freeroll with a \$3,200 prize pool that pays the top-five finishers.

October's winner was Russ Waggoner, who represented One-Eyed Jacks. He pocketed \$1,200 and got his name inscribed on the trophy, which then resides at One-Eyed Jacks for one month.

To qualify for a chance to play in the Battle of the Bay tournament, you need only to place in the top 20 Player of the Month standings at either card room. The location of the tournament alternates monthly between the rooms. For more info contact Lucky's at 813-932-4313 or One-Eyed Jacks at 941-355-5771 x1054.

In other Lucky's news, Will Bleakley won the room's \$200 buy-in, \$10K guaranteed event for October. The tournament is the last Saturday of every month at 1 p.m. The October event had 55 players and Bleakley won the \$3,303 top prize.



Russ Waggoner, representing One-Eyed Jacks in Sarasota, shows off his winning cards and the trophy that now bears his name after taking down October's Battle of the Bay event at Lucky's.

Here are the remaining cashers in Lucky's \$10K guaranteed:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2. Kevin Collins, \$2,302 | 5. Joel Geist, \$800 |
| 3. Lloyd Marks, \$1,401 | 6. Scott Griffin, \$700 |
| 4. Brad Ruben, \$1,001 | 7. Mike Nadeau, \$500 |



Marc Lowe, playing for Tampa's Bilmar Station in the Treasure Chest Poker Battle of the Bars tournament, shows off his winning pocket jacks and the trophy that will reside at Bilmar Station until the next Battle. Lowe beat John Hendrix of Tampa's The Slug for the crown. Marc She-nondoah, who played for Bilmar Station, finished third. Lowe not only wins bragging rights for Bilmar Station, but he also gets a \$50 gas card.

Mazzatta still leads race

Can anyone knock off Mickey Mazzatta from the top spot? He has had a stranglehold on first place in the Silks Poker Room's Player of the Year race for months. The winner gets \$25K at year's end and the rest of the top 10 split \$25K.

POY leaders as of 11/1/08

- | | |
|---------------------|-------|
| 1. Mickey Mazzatta | 1,539 |
| 2. Vincent Griffo | 1,369 |
| 3. Steve Darr | 1,137 |
| 4. Jim Larsen | 999 |
| 5. Henry Symulevich | 943 |
| 6. Muriel Yantiss | 853 |
| 7. Andre Papangelou | 806 |
| 8. Andrea Bauer | 780 |
| 9. Gil Tai | 694 |
| 10. Rich O'Hearn | 670 |

SILKS TO HOST PAR AND POKER CHARITY EVENT

By Christopher Cosenza

"The golf is show, but the poker is dough," said Leonard Walker, chief marketing officer for the Par and Poker Celebrity Challenge for Charity, which will be in Tampa on Jan. 29. "That's what's going to make money for the charities. ... Poker is something that's very important to us and hopefully we will be able to provide the only professional poker tournament during Super Bowl week."

The event, which benefits the Joyner-Walker Foundation, will hold its poker tournament at Tampa Bay Downs' Silks Poker Room in Tampa, while TPC Tampa Bay in Lutz will host the golf festivities.

Greg Raymer, the 2004 World Series of Poker Main Event champ, participated in last year's golf and poker tournaments. This year, says Walker, the charity is looking to lure a few more poker pros to play in the event. But you can't forget about the other celebrities who will be out in full force. Committed to play: Ozzie Smith, Clyde Drexler, Joe Carter, Lawrence Taylor, Ed Moses and Alfonso Ribeiro. Plus Walker is trying to get Bill Cosby, or as he said, "The guy with the pudding pops."

"Here's the thing about it," Walker said, "during Super Bowl week we have access to celebrities who are already going to be here. So once they hear about our event they'll already be able to come by. Our problem is being able to have enough space because we try to get 25 celebrities but we end up getting 35 that show up (like last year)."

And Walker couldn't be happier with Tampa Bay Downs as host.

"My first overall impression with Tampa Bay Downs is their openness and wanting that exclusivity and partnership," he said. "That is something we never got from anyone else (in the Tampa Bay area). Tampa Bay Downs looked at this as a partnership ... they cared about the charity ... so they looked at this as a partnership and not just another client."

"After meeting with the co-founders of the Par

and Poker Celebrity Challenge for Charity, I understand the great commitment of the Joyner-Walker Foundation to our community and the tournament in particular," said Patrick Murphy, director of poker operations for Tampa Bay Downs. "We are thrilled to be hosting a poker event that gives back so much in a fun and entertaining way."

So what is the Joyner-Walker Foundation?

"Our No. 1 goal, obviously, is financial literacy, youth education and personal money management," said Walker, who is the brother of the charity's co-founder Andy Walker, an NCAA golf champ. Ex-NFL great Seth Joyner is the other co-founder. "Our own little life-skill programs are interviewing, resume building, mentoring and dress for success. Those are the other life-skill programs we are looking to do. We actually

want to embody the whole youth, from financial ways, from the way they present themselves and just to make a better person out of them. We really believe that our primary goal, especially with the way the economy is, is to push that financial education."

Last year the event raised nearly \$350,000.

"I know the economic times are a little bit difficult," he said, "but we feel more than confident we will raise that and exceed that amount. ... We're never going to forget where we came from and what we're providing the host city, so it needs to be a community event. All of the volunteers will come from the host city, the 200 volunteers. This year we're doing a Taste of Tampa and have 10 restaurants on the course for the community to come out and enjoy food. We'll have a network tent with a lot of business entrepreneurs. ... So we want to create that community feel for someone coming from the outside in to Tampa. We feel that's only fair that the money we raise goes back into that community, if that's through volunteerism, or if that's through monetary in looking at non-profits in the area to give money from the event. That's what we want to do."

For more information visit parandpoker.com.



WPT champion Hoyt Corkins to play in Ebro charity event Dec. 9



WPT and WSOP champ Hoyt Corkins will play in Ebro Greyhound Park's Charity Poker Challenge on Dec. 9.

The event will have a \$275 buy-in. First place wins a seat into the WPT Celebrity Invitational at the Commerce Casino in Los Angeles on Feb. 28-March 2, plus airfare and hotel accommodations. For more information on the Ebro tournament please call 850-234-3943.

If you're traveling to Ebro, special room rates are available at the Shores of Panama. Call 850-249-0109 for details.





Ryder Cup captain Paul Azinger, at right, brought the Ryder Cup to One-Eyed Jacks at Sarasota Kennel Club, where he posed for pictures, including this one taken with poker room manager Sam Minutello. Players got to hold the Cup and some even got to drink from it. The Americans defeated the Europeans 16½ to 11½ to win the Cup for the first time since 1999.

Naples-Ft. Myers' Betting for Boobies tournament raises more than \$2K for Komen Foundation



In honor of October being Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Naples-Ft. Myers poker room helped raise more than \$2,000 for the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation with its Betting For Boobies tournament on Oct. 17.

The room donated \$25 from each of the 37 entrants and held a raffle for door prizes and more.

The money raised will benefit breast cancer research and awareness.



Above, Sharon Read is all smiles after winning the Betting for Boobies tournament that raised money for the Susan G. Komen Foundation. At left, Kevin Carniali holds a raffle to help raise more money for the cause as poker room manager Cindy Fra, far left, helps out with the details.



Home games can be dangerous and illegal

By M. Elizabeth Lanier
Ante Up Correspondent

Every once in a while, my husband will mention he's heard about a great home game that promises huge payouts. It always seems to kill his enthusiasm when I tell him to leave enough money so I can use it for bail. That usually leads to a discussion about whether home games are legal — "everybody does it" isn't a good argument — and eventually he goes to a card room where there's no question about whether he'll need bail money.

So, what's the Florida law on home games? While this is by no means an exhaustive discussion on the topic, in general, state law prohibits gambling or gaming unless it's done in a legally authorized place, such as a card room. There are criminal penalties for people who operate and work in gambling houses, which would include illegal card rooms.

There is, however, an exception in the statute for the friendly home game, or the "penny-ante game." Games covered under this exception are poker, pinocle, bridge, rummy, canasta, hearts, dominoes and mahjong. Winnings can't exceed \$10 in a round, hand or game. Also, to qualify, the game must:

1. Take place in the home of a participant; common areas of a condominium, cooperative, residential subdivision, or mobile home park where a participant lives; facilities of an organization which is tax-exempt under § 501(c)(7) of the Internal Revenue Code; or college dorm room or the common recreational area of a college dorm or a publicly owned community center owned by a municipality or county.
2. Not have an admission charge, rake or other consideration for the game occurring there;
3. Not be advertised in advance; and
4. Not have any player younger than 18.

If the home game meets all requirements then it meets the penny-ante game exception to state law. However, before assuming participation is 100 percent legal, home-gamers should check their county and city laws to make sure these local laws are not more restrictive than what the state statute allows.

Clearly, the kind of "great" home games my husband talks about do not meet the penny-ante game exception, and it seems that once games like these get big enough or draw attention, trouble quickly follows. For example, in January four people in Clearwater were arrested and taken into custody (one for running a gambling house, two for working there and a fourth for gambling and drug-related charges), and 19 were charged with misdemeanor gambling and given notices to appear in court. Among other things, police found \$20,000-\$30,000.

Operators and participants in illegal home games can draw criminals as well. In January 2007, armed robbers hit an illegal Jacksonville home game and stole more than \$7,000. The operator called the police, but they arrested him on felony charges of running a gambling house and money laundering. Several poker game invasions have resulted in deaths. In New Smyrna Beach robbers shot and killed a player in 2007. Palatka saw two poker-related shootings in a two-month span in 2008. In the first game, a man killed three others because he suspected them of cheating. In the second incident, one man, who coincidentally was at the first game, was wounded.

Home games can be legal, under the very narrow penny-ante game exception. Straying from the exception could lead to jail or worse.

— Liz Lanier is an attorney and mediator in Tampa. The focus of her practice is civil litigation and she is licensed to practice law in Florida and Georgia. Her e-mail address is: liz@lanierlawoffice.com.

Bottom photo courtesy of John Henry

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IT TURNS OUT, LEVY CAN PLAY LIVE, TOO

If you thought the success of Florida's top online players was restricted to the virtual tables, think again. Florida has a number of players who are part of online pro teams. These online players are finding it just as easy to win at the real tables.

A Florida player who recently has been tearing up the live poker circuit is Orlando's Adam "Roothlus" Levy. With his most recent cash coming out of Las Vegas, Levy pocketed \$266,445 after finishing fifth in Event No. 16 at the Festa al Lago Classic. The WPT event, a \$15,000 buy-in no-limit hold'em tourney, featured a field of 368 players and a prize pool of \$5,354,400.

At this year's World Series of Poker, Levy cashed six times, including a 48th-place finish in the Main Event that netted him \$135,100. Levy received special "attention" from Phil Hellmuth for giving him a perceived "bad beat" during ESPN coverage. Levy flopped an open-ended straight draw holding Q-10 and Hellmuth had pocket eights. The turn gave Levy his straight and Hellmuth a set. When the hands were shown



Hellmuth went nuts because Levy had called his prelop raise with Q-10. It made for good television as it was clear Hellmuth didn't know who the talented Levy was. He does now, however, as they became teammates in mid October when Levy signed on as one of UltimateBet's Star Players.

Florida's online standings have seen some changes, too. Newcomer Steven Burkholder "PiKappRaider" has taken over the top spot due mainly to his first-place win in one of the WCOOP events on PokerStars for \$211K. Corey Burbick, a 21-year-old player from Tallahassee, has moved into second place. Burbick plays under "comandr_cool" and won more than \$200K in September and October combined. In third place with more than \$222K won the past two months is a 26-year-old Fort Lauderdale resident who is bit of a mystery man. All we know is he plays under the online handle of "toetagu" and his name is Ryan. If you know Ryan send us an e-mail at editor@anteupmagazine.com.

— John Lanier plays as "WildHare" on most poker sites and lives in Lutz.

Photo courtesy of WPT

PokerStars

To celebrate tennis legend Boris Becker joining Team PokerStars team, the world's largest

poker site is giving you the chance to meet and play against him in the Bahamas at the PokerStars Caribbean Adventure on Jan. 5-10.



Doyle's Room

How about a tournament with \$10,000 guaranteed, a small buy-in and a second, third or fourth

chance? Doyle's Room has amped up the evening schedule with a \$10,000 guaranteed tournament every Tuesday and Thursday. Along with its current tournaments the site is dispensing \$4 million a month.



Full Tilt

Look for daily Happy Hours and earn points two to three times faster



UltimateBet

Take a seat in its \$5,000 guaranteed rebuy tournament (\$1 buy-in) every night at 9 to be a part of the UltimateBet's pro bounty madness. When

you knock out one of the pros you'll win the amount of cash they used for rebuys and add-ons.

Absolute Poker



The site has introduced a new feature to help keep track of folded hands. The "Show Folded

Cards" function lets players see the cards they folded at any given time during a hand. "Poker

than usual. You'll know which tables are offering double or triple points by looking for the smiley face in the "Players" column of the Full Tilt Poker lobby

players love to remain a part of every poker hand, even after they folded their cards," an Absolute spokesperson said. "Our new feature helps players remember exactly which cards they tossed away so that they can better follow along with hands that they're no longer a part of and improve their game over time."

Columbo Turns the Page, continued from Page 37

I assume you deduced what I did. He took a flop with some sort of speculative hand, flopped a draw and did not make his hand on the turn when the board paired.

The ace provided a convenient way to bluff his missed draw. Too bad for him I had a bullet. I planned for this when he checked the turn, and decided in advance to check-call the river. The ace was really just gravy.

He showed 9♣J♣ for a strong draw played weakly. Had he been a real tough guy, pushing the action, I may have taken a powder. But the way this played out, I decided to get stubborn.

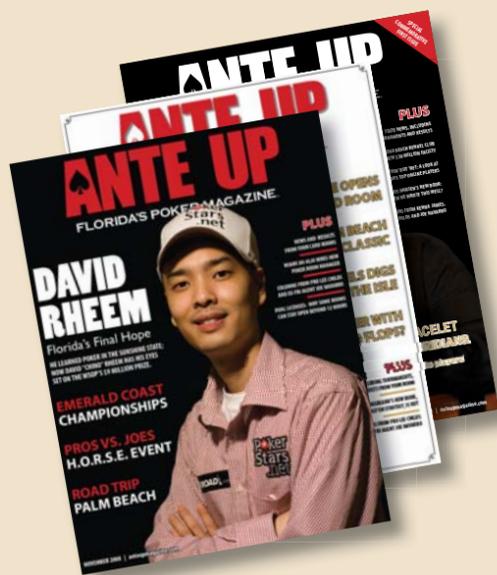
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Miami Thrice

Three very different poker rooms highlight the Miami area.

Miccosukee Resort & Gaming

Though the Miccosukee Resort and Gaming facility is in Miami, it's in a world of its own, located almost in the Everglades on the western side of the city. The towering resort (302 rooms) and casino seem to rise out of the plush green acres as you approach off U.S. 41.

And its poker room is as spacious as the reservation upon which it sits. There are 30 tables, nine large-screen televisions for viewing sports and parimutuels and you are allowed to smoke at the poker table as long as you are not sitting next to the dealer. Games spread are standard -- hold'em (\$100 min-max buy-in \$1-2, \$2-4 limit and \$1-2, \$2-5 no-limit) Omaha/8 (\$2-4) and 7-card stud —

though it's been told that a game of Tahoe breaks out on occasion. Look for \$60 no-limit hold'em tournaments on Fridays and Saturdays, too.

There's a progressive royal flush jackpot (all suits) that starts at \$3K and a Players Club Card that can earn rewards such as meals and rooms at the resort. Also, four of a kind gets you a T-shirt, four aces wins \$50 and a straight flush earns you a room.

Players may find the rules at Miccosukee a little strict (no reading, cell phone use, listening to music or eating at the table) but the brush says that's just to ensure a well-paced game and it helps avoid having cards slide under any of these objects.



Where: Miami
Phone: 877-242-6464 toll free
Web site: miccosukee.com



Miami Jai-Alai



Florida Gaming's Crystal Card Room at Miami Jai-Alai is one of the finest-looking poker rooms in all of Florida. From its beautiful chandeliers and cavernous ceilings to its generously spaced tables and table-side dining, the Crystal Card Room does everything it can to make the room as aesthetically pleasing for the player.

Nelson Costa, recently named poker room manager (read his profile in last month's issue of *Ante Up* at anteupmagazine.com), says though they have 20 poker tables, they will be expanding. He usually spreads just no-limit hold'em (\$1-2 \$40 min-max buy-in, \$2-5 and \$5-10 with \$100 buy-in) but says he also will spread other games if there's enough interest. He has progressive jackpots for royal flushes, four aces pays \$100 as do the hourly high hands.

Costa is most proud of his staff and says his room is unique in many ways.

"One of the things that sets us aside from other poker rooms is the players have different game options such as dominos and jai-alai available to them. And for their convenience we have bet-runners that come to them so they don't even have to get up from their poker games to place their bets."

Tournament buy-ins range from \$65-\$300 (including satellites) and main event tournaments feature bracelets and trophies.

Costa also offers a large selection of freeroll events for poker and dominos and the staff will give free lessons to those who are just starting to play hold'em.



Where: Miami
Phone: 305-633-6400
Web site: fla-gaming.com/miami/poker.htm

Flagler Greyhound Track

The Magic City Poker Room at Flagler Greyhound Track has been open for about 11 years, and it's known just one poker room manager in that time: Ileana Zamora. Before she helped open the poker room in the late 1990s, she was a shift manager at Mardi Gras and she worked the gambling day cruises before that.

Zamora, who has a staff of 60 (including 40 dealers), says it's the little things that her players appreciate. "We have a VIP program for the players," she said. "There are three levels: Silver, Gold and Platinum."

On Sundays they have three giveaways and prizes range from T-shirts and gift cards to tickets for sporting events.

"The frequency that a player comes to the room determines their level. They start at Silver and qualify for the giveaways. Once they reach Gold they get complimentary parking, and Platinum players get free parking and a free drink."

The brush records the player's number and they're rewarded on total appearances, not total time. "All you have to do is show up," Zamora said.

They also have high hands from open till 3 p.m. The player that wins gets \$100 and players at the table who were dealt a hand get \$25 each.

"It's nice to buy them lunch," she said. "And that creates a lot of stir in the room."

Speaking of the room, it has 18 tables, dealing mostly no-limit hold'em (\$1-2, \$2-5 and \$5-10), but there's a \$2-4 limit table running most days and Omaha/8 is spread. Don't look for 7-card stud, however.

"Not one person has asked for it this year," Zamora said.

Flagler, which has sister properties at Naples-Ft. Myers Greyhound Track and in Corpus Christi, Texas, has an interesting "mix of cultures," according to Zamora.

"In this area we have a lot of people come from Central America and it's their winter. We don't see seasons here. We have a couple of players come from Chile because it's too cold there in the summer."

And one bit of advice: The poker room is on the first floor. When entering the facility, be sure to tell the attendant at the front that you're there to play poker and you'll be directed to the room.



Magic City Poker Room manager Ileana Zamora



Where: Miami
Phone: 305-649-300
Web site: flaglerdogs.com

Dania Jai-Alai

Phone: (954) 927-2841
www.dania-jai-alai.com
Tournaments: \$25 with \$5 bounty Sun., T-F at 12:30; M-F at 3, M&W at 6:30 and Sat. (12:30, 7:30 & 11 p.m.); \$50 w/high hand award Tue. at 6:30; \$50 with \$10 bounty Thurs. at 6:30 & Sun. at 5; \$100 w/7K chips & 30-minute blinds Fri. at 6:30 & Sun. at 12:30; \$55 every Sun. at 8. Also, a \$50 7-card stud held Saturdays at 4. Re-entry is allowed into all tournaments for one hour.
High hands: Noon-3 p.m. wins \$200; separate royal flush jackpots for each suit.
Promotions: Every Wednesday night a hot dog & fries, wings (3), 20-ounce soft drinks, 16-ounce drafts, frozen drinks or regular soft serve cone are each just 99 cents.

Daytona Beach Kennel Club

Phone: (386) 252-6484
www.daytonagreyhound.com/pokerroom
Tournaments: Daily, including Wednesday Ladies Only at 1 p.m. (\$25); Friday, 50-player max; and Saturday, Pot-Limit Omaha/8.
SNGs: \$40-\$220.
High hands: M-T paid every hour, W-Su every two hours; high hands win \$50-\$100; royal flushes in tournaments win \$1K, cash games \$250-\$500.
Bad beat: Aces full of kings.

Derby Lane

Phone: (727) 812-3339 ext. 7
www.derbylane.com
Tournaments: Daily, including Knockout Deep Stack (\$65, 4K units); Knockout Double Deep Stack (\$110, 8K units); Monday KO Madness, 4 p.m. (\$70); and Midnight Madness (\$60).
High hands: Royals in hold'em and stud.
Bad beat: Aces full of jacks.

Ebro Greyhound Park

Phone: (850) 535-4048
www.ebrogreyhoundpark.com
Tournaments: Big Stack Sundays, (\$150, 2 p.m.); Monday (\$40, 7) and Thursday bounty (\$75, 7)
Special event: Dec. 9, Charity Challenge with Hoyt Corkins, \$275 (see ad on pg. 31)
High hands: Royal flush jackpots and two high hands per day. On Thanksgiving there will be a \$100 high hand every 15 minutes and \$100 aces cracked from noon to midnight.
Bad beat: Quad deuces.

Flagler Greyhound Track

Phone: (305) 649-3000
www.flaglerdogs.com
Tournaments: Sunday 2 p.m. Winner Take All (\$25); Monday, 7 (\$75). **SNGs:** \$65-\$800.
High hands: From opening to 3 p.m. high hand wins \$100, all other players at the table win \$25; non-heart royal flushes win \$500.
Other: VIP card raffles at 3, 6 and 9 p.m. Sundays.

Ft. Pierce Jai-Alai and Poker

Phone: (772) 464-7500
www.jaialai.net/poker.php
Tournaments: Monday 7 p.m. (\$75); Tuesday 12:30 (\$55); Wednesday bounty 6:30 (\$85).
SNGs: Thursday-Saturday (\$65-\$110)
High hands: Every two hours Monday and Tuesday.
Bad beat: Aces full of queens (hold'em), quads (stud) and quad jacks (Omaha).
Other: Happy Hour drink specials from 4-7 p.m.; free coffee and doughnuts 11:30-1 p.m. M-Th.

Gulfstream Park

Phone: (954) 457-6336
www.casinoatgulfstream.com
Tournaments: Daily at 6:30 p.m., including \$50+\$5 bounties M-W-F and Saturday Special, \$100, 10K.
SNGs: \$100-\$500.
Promotions: Earn points by playing in qualifying rounds nightly at 6:30. Top 50 point earners will play for a 2009 Mercedes C-Class on Dec. 7.

Hamilton Jai-Alai and Poker

Phone: (800) 941-4841
www.hamiltondownsjaialai.com
Tournaments: Thursday 7, Sunday 3, \$65; Friday 7 (w/rebuys), \$65; Saturday, bounty event, \$100. Freerolls every other Sunday. Be one of the first 50 to sign up. Prize pool is \$1,000, first place wins \$300, second \$250, third \$200, fourth \$150 and fifth \$100.
High hands: Each Friday, Saturday and Sunday wins \$500; quad jacks win \$50 on Thursdays; jackpot for royal flushes. **Bad beat:** Aces full of kings.
Promotions: Splash the Pot (Mondays): Every hour, a table is picked at random and \$50 is added to the pot. **10s or Better (Tuesdays & Thursdays):** Win with quad 10s or better and you win \$50 extra. Only one card needed in your hand. **Double Win (Tuesdays):** The highest hand of quads or better by 5 p.m. wins \$200. and then the same from 5 to 10 p.m. If no one has quads during the period, the \$200 rolls over to the next time period.

Isle Casino at Pompano Park

Phone: (954) 972-2000 x5123 or x5124
www.theislepompanopark.com/casino-poker.aspx
Tournaments: \$60-\$550. **SNGs:** Including heads-up and bounties (\$60-\$840).
High hand: Full houses earn a ticket for a \$1,000 drawing; royal flushes win \$100.
Bad beat: Call for details.

Jefferson County Kennel Club

Phone: (850) 997-2561
www.jckcpokerroom.com
Tournaments: Friday-Saturday, 7:30 p.m. (\$50).
High hand: Royal flushes win jackpot.

Mardi Gras Gaming

Phone: (877) 557-5687 x3167
www.playmardigras.com
Tournaments: M-W-F (buy-ins vary from \$65-\$100).
SNGs: \$55-\$110.
High hands: Royal flushes win \$599.
Bad beat: Aces full of jacks (HE), quad jacks (O/8) and aces full of kings (stud).

Melbourne Greyhound Park

Phone: (321) 259-9800
www.melbournegreyhoundpark.com
Tournaments: \$65-\$120, include shootout, ladies, heads-up and bounty events.
SNGs, bad beats and promotions: Call for details.

Miami Jai-Alai

Phone: (305) 633-6400
www.fl-gaming.com/miami/poker.htm
Tournaments: Saturday Freeroll, 3 p.m.
Special event: Dec. 21, \$7,500 guaranteed, \$110 buy-in, 6,000 chips (includes \$10 add-on of 2,500 chips)
Promotions: Call for current offers.

Miccosukee Resort

Phone: (877) 242-6464
www.miccosukee.com/entertainment_poker.htm
Tournaments: Super Hold'em Saturday, 7 p.m.
SNGs: NLHE, 7-card stud and Omaha/8.
Promotions: Call for current offers.

Naples-Fort Myers Greyhound Track

Phone: (239) 992-2411
www.naplesfortmyersdogs.com
Tournaments: Sunday 2 p.m. (\$125); Monday 7 (\$65); Wednesday bounty, 7 (\$125); Thursday noon (\$65) and Saturday 2 (\$230).
High hands: From noon to 2 p.m., high hand wins \$300; any royal flush pays \$2,500, plus an entry for a drawing to win a 2009 Honda Accord or Toyota Camry. Drawing is Dec. 13, must be present to win.

Continued on next page

Tell your poker room managers to email us at editor@anteupmagazine.com

Ocala Poker and Jai-Alai

Phone: (352) 591-2345
www.ocalapoker.com
Tournaments: Wednesday 6:30 p.m. (\$65-\$240)
SNGs: Call for details.
High hands: Noon to 5:45 and 6-11:45 p.m.; diamond royal flush wins jackpot.
Other: Monday is Crazy Pineapple Day, Tuesday is Stud Day and Thursday is Omaha Day. Games start at 3 p.m. Manager's specials noon to 3 and 9-11 p.m.

Orange Park Kennel Club

Phone: (904) 646-0002
www.jaxpokerroom.com
Tournaments: Daily, except Tuesday (\$35-\$100).
High hand: \$100 every three hours; royals \$200.
Bad beat: Call for details.

Palm Beach Kennel Club

Phone: (561) 683-2222
www.pbkennelclub.com
Tournaments: \$65-\$200; bounty tourneys on Tuesdays at noon (\$65+\$25).
Special event: Nov. 28, \$25K guaranteed, (\$100).
SNGs, bad beats and promotions: Call for offers.

Palm Beach Princess

Phone: (561) 818-5771
www.palmbeachprincess.com
Special event: Nov. 29, WPT Foxwoods satellite (\$340 buy-in).
Promotions: Call for offers and WPT details.

Sarasota Kennel Club

Phone: (941) 355-7744 ext. 1054
www.skcpoker.com
Tournaments: \$40-\$100, plus Saturday \$330 at 3:30 p.m.
SNGs: \$40-\$300.
High hands: Quads (hold'em), quad 10s (stud) and straight flushes (Omaha) or better.
Special event: Pros vs. Joes, Gavin Smith Invitational, Nov. 26-29. See ad on page 24 for details.

Seminole Casino Coconut Creek

Phone: (866) 222-7466
www.seminolecoconutcreekcasinoc.com
SNGs: \$55, \$85, \$135.
Bad beat: Aces over jacks.
Promotions: Call for current offers.

Seminole Casino Brighton

Phone: (866) 222-7466
www.seminolecasinobrighton.com
Tournaments: Monday 7 (NLHE, \$100); Tuesday 7 (7-card stud, \$80); Wednesday 7 (NLHE \$20 w/rebuys); Thursday 7:30 (Omaha, \$130); Friday 7 (NLHE \$100) and Saturday 2 (NLHE \$65) and 7 (NLHE \$200).
SNGs: \$42-\$250.
Promotions: Call for current offers.

Seminole Hard Rock Hollywood

Phone: (866) 502-7529
www.seminolehardrockhollywood.com
Tournaments: \$100-\$1,100.
SNGs: \$140-\$1,050
High hands: Prizes range from \$100 to tournament entry fees. Call for details.

Seminole Hard Rock Tampa

Phone: (866) 502-7529
www.seminolehardrocktampa.com
Tournaments: \$100-\$550.
SNGs: \$125-\$1,075.
Promotions: Call for current offers.

Seminole Hollywood Classic

Phone: (866) 222-7466
www.seminolehollywoodcasino.com
Tournaments: \$30-\$150.
High hands: Mondays, every hour winner gets \$200 (if a hold'em hand) or \$100 (if an Omaha hand) from noon-8 p.m.; Saturdays, every hour top two get \$100 each.
Other: First 25 hold'em players (Tue. & Thurs) with aces cracked win \$100.

Seminole Casino Immokalee

Phone: (866) 222-7466
www.theseminolecasino.com
Tournaments: Wednesday, 7 p.m. (\$15+\$5+\$5 dealer toke, with \$10 rebuy); Thursday, 7, (\$30+\$5+\$5 dealer toke, with \$10 rebuy); Friday, 7 (\$50+\$5+\$5 dealer toke); Saturday, 1, Knockout (\$30+\$5+\$5 dealer toke, with \$10 rebuy); On Sundays, Deep Stack Tournament, \$115, 10K chips, 20-minute levels.
High hands: Quad Aces (hold'em) wins \$50, straight flush (hold'em) wins \$100, royal flush (hold'em and stud) wins \$500. Payouts doubled between 12:01-6 a.m. and 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Monday-Thursday.
Bad beat: Aces full of jacks (hold'em), Aces full of kings (stud).
Other promotions: Hot dog and a beer for \$2 from 7-midnight Fridays and Sundays and 1-5 p.m. Saturdays.

St. Johns Greyhound Park

Phone: (904) 646-0002
www.jaxpokerroom.com
Tournaments: \$35-\$100, including shootouts, bounties and deep stacks.
High hand: \$100 every three hours, royals \$200.
Bad beat: Call for details.

SunCruz — Jacksonville

Phone: (800) 474-3423
www.suncruzcasino.com
Tournaments and promotions: Call for details.

SunCruz — Port Canaveral

Phone: (321) 799-3511
www.suncruzcasino.com
Tournament and promotions: Call for details.

Tampa Bay Downs

Phone: (866) 823-6967
www.tampabaydowns.com
Tournaments: \$20-\$120. **SNGs:** \$65-\$800.
High hands: Royal flushes win jackpots in hold'em cash games and tournaments; royals in Omaha win \$200-\$599, straight flushes in hold'em win \$200; quads and straight flushes in Omaha win a hat, T-shirt and \$10 food voucher.
Promotions: All day Sunday and 8 p.m. to close Mondays, draft beer is \$1, hot dogs are \$2 and hamburgers are \$4. Prizes, including jerseys and cash, will be given away; Players can win Plinko pucks on Tuesdays and Fridays, which will be dropped on the Plinko board for prizes. \$599: On Nov. 29, \$599 will be given away every half hour.

Tampa Greyhound Track

Phone: (813) 932-4313
www.luckyscards.com
Tournaments: \$45-\$200, and bounty events on Friday and Saturday. A Mini-Turbo Super Deep Stack is held Sundays at 6:30 (\$50 buy-in with 8K chips, and an extra 1,000 chips for a \$5 dealer toke.) **SNGs:** \$65-\$500.

High hands: Quads (\$75), straight flushes (\$200) and royal flushes (\$599). Plus high hand wins \$100 on Sundays from noon-3 and 8-11 p.m.
Other: Aces cracked wins \$100 from noon to 2 p.m.
Promotions: Every time the Bucs score in a game televised in the room, a live game table will be chosen and \$50 will be added to the next pot; Get aces full or better, and you'll get one of the 100 squares for the next Monday Night Football game. The prize pool during the game starts at \$1,000, and winning squares get 5 percent of the pool, but only if they claim it before the next kickoff. If not, the money is returned to the pool for the next winner. Any money not claimed by 11:55 p.m. rolls over into the next game, plus \$500 more.

* Schedules and events are subject to change; SNG = single-table tournaments; all tournaments are no-limit hold'em unless noted.



Cover and poker photo courtesy of PokerStars; basketball photo courtesy of Mercier family

MERCILESS

He may be just 22 years old, but Jason Mercier of Davie has the chops of a veteran rounder and already has put together a résumé that most poker pros would covet.

BY CHRISTOPHER COSENZA

The blood poured down his face from his left temple, but Jason Mercier didn't care. It was his senior year playing basketball for Hollywood's Sheriden Hills Christian and his team needed him. A player from the other team had undercut him on the first play of the game and Jason had landed hard on his head. His father, Richard Mercier, picks up the story from there.

"I went over to see if he was OK," Richard said, "and he was bleeding heavily from a gash on his left temple. I knew he needed stitches and told him he needed to go to the hospital. He kept refusing, telling me he was fine, and he just needed to get back in the game. He would not listen to me, and he was slurring his speech. I could see in his eyes and hear in his speech that he was not all there!"

But calmer heads prevailed, and Jason went to the hospital to receive stitches, and the news that he had suffered a concussion. Four years later the concussion is gone, but that competitive fire burns even hotter for Jason Mercier. The 22-year-old poker pro from Davie points to those days as a three-sport star as the catalyst to his success on the felt.

"When I used to play basketball I wouldn't stop trying to win until the buzzer went off," he said. "So it's kind of the same thing in poker. I never give up on a tournament. If I have three big blinds I'm still trying to make the right decision and play as optimally as possible. It's that competitive nature that kind of relates from playing sports so much."

Mercier (pronounced MER-see-yer) didn't just play sports in high school. His earliest memory of playing poker was of the five-card draw variety, struggling for nickels and dimes on the weekends against his 10th-grade buddies. But it wasn't until he embraced online poker while attending

Florida Atlantic University that Mercier realized there was serious money to be won.

"Near the end of 2006 I (deposited) \$1,000 on PokerStars and built it up to like \$8K in a couple months just playing some cash games. ... I thought about not going to school for the first semester of 2007, but I was still living with my parents. Their rules were you had to go to school if you were living in their house. So I decided to handle both, go to school and try to play 40 hours a week for the first semester."

Making money playing poker was the easy part; the hard part was telling his parents he wanted to give up his full scholarship at FAU to pursue poker full time.

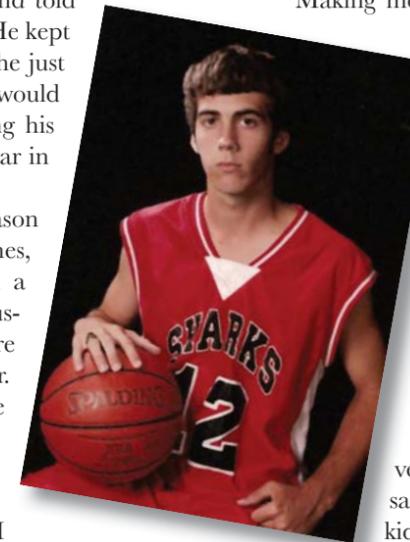
"It was pretty difficult," he said. "I knew they were going to be opposed to it. The money didn't really matter at that point because there was no way I was going to make enough to tell them that I could do it. They weren't convinced so I knew I would have to prove it to them before they could get on board and be happy with what I was doing."

Mercier's father agrees.

"(It was) one of the most difficult conversations we ever had," the elder Mercier said. "Making a living playing cards? Are you kidding me? ... Plus (Jason) was the baby of our family, the youngest of the four, and he was striking out on his own at by far the youngest age."

So, with his parents grudgingly giving their blessing, Jason left home to give it a go. They talked virtually every day about his progress, in poker and in life, but his plans didn't work out as well as he had hoped. After about two months, living arrangements fell through and he asked to come home. That's when Jason and his parents came to an agreement.

"He asked if we could meet and talk about what he was trying to do with the poker playing," Richard said. "When





Mercier's millions

Since April 2008 Mercier has been lighting up the poker scene to the tune of nearly \$3 million in winnings. Here are his stats in live tournaments.

Event	Place	Winnings
EPT High Roller	1st	\$944,847
WSOPE PLO	8th	\$48,763
EPT Barcelona	6th	\$324,946
Bellagio Weekly	13th	\$4,205
WSOP event	51st	\$10,972
WSOP event	22nd	\$15,594
WSOP event	13th	\$30,203
EPT San Remo	1st	\$1,372,893

we met we discussed what would and would not be acceptable, and we agreed he could play 15 hours a week, as long as he worked a job and went back to school at Broward Community College.”

‘Please let me win this’

And so Jason went on the grind, playing millions of hands at \$2-\$4 and \$3-\$6 no-limit hold'em online in his parents' house. And that's when destiny stepped in. He occasionally gave satellites a try and eventually won a seat at the European Poker Tour's San Remo event in April. His friends, who were planning to go with him to Italy, changed their minds and wanted to visit Amsterdam instead. Mercier easily could've just cashed in his seat and hung out with them in the Netherlands, but remember the blood on the face? A first-team all-Broward County basketball player doesn't just cash in to visit the Red Light District. Mercier had something to prove, to his family and to himself. He now feels fate led him to the Old Continent and he didn't want to interfere.

“I fully believe in that,” Mercier said. “I think it was definitely supposed to happen. God definitely had a part of it. I prayed at one point during the tournament, ‘Please let me win this.’”

It was a lot of pressure for the then-21-year-old who had made a stand with his parents and had given up on a teaching career, so it's understandable that he'd look to a higher power to guide him. And if he wasn't a believer in divine intervention before that tournament, he certainly was after his hand with English pro **Roland de Wolfe**. It was Day 2 of the tournament and the field still hadn't reached the money bubble.

“I had pocket jacks and I got all-in vs. Roland de Wolfe's pocket queens on a 10-3-6 flop. The turn came a five and the river was a jack. I would've had about 6,000 chips left with the

blinds at 1,000-2,000. So I would've pretty much been out if I had lost that hand.”

After that pot Mercier was in control and took down the event and the \$1.3 million payday. He had a less than 5 percent chance of winning that hand on the river. Mind-boggling, isn't it?

“It's hard to grasp,” he said. “If that jack doesn't come on the river, the last six months don't happen. They are completely different.”

The win not only solidified his place as one of poker's up-and-coming stars, it of course made his parents very happy.

“They were excited and got to watch the whole thing on EPT live,” Mercier said.

Richard knew it was coming, sort of. “When he was 9 or 10 I said to my wife Dottie, ‘You know, Jason will probably be a millionaire by the time he's 21!’ Now I wish I had said that about all four of our kids! I knew early on that he rarely failed at something when he put his mind to accomplishing it.”

The victory opened up so many more doors for Mercier.

“I probably would've played maybe four events at the World Series instead of the 22 that I did,” he said. “And you know, even though I didn't have a good World Series I know that, 100 percent, the experience I got from playing with a lot of the top pros helped me in my game even more and was probably one of the reasons I was able to play against such tough fields at the Million Pound Showdown and do so well.”

But let's not jump ahead to that just yet. After his three nominal cashes at the WSOP in Las Vegas, Mercier headed back over The Pond to play in the EPT Barcelona event. That same week he was up for the EPT's Newcomer of the Year award,



Mercier photo courtesy of PokerStars

Mercier's three guidelines to becoming a better poker player

Even the best poker players need a little reminder from time to time to help keep them focused. For Jason Mercier, that reminder comes in the form of guidelines on a piece of paper taped to the wall above his computer desk. He explains them here:

I came up with those with my best friend, Darko. We were talking about how you always need to stay positive. That's the first rule. When you start getting a negative attitude and negative energy you just can't win. I'm a firm believer in positive energy and positive thinking in poker and in life. So that's the first rule, always stay positive.

The second rule is pretty much only for online poker, but it's “Don't Chat,” meaning don't talk to people at the tables online. A lot of times when you see a guy take a bad beat or a guy makes a pretty bad call and wins, someone will start berating them, typing in “What the hell is the matter with you? Don't you know how to play?”

There are two reasons why you

1. Stay Positive
2. Don't Chat!
3. Be Confident

shouldn't do that. First, it gets you off of your game and what you should be thinking about. The second is you don't want to teach the bad players how to play better. I remember a specific instance where I did that. A guy knocked me out, made a really bad call in a tournament and I started berating him, typing “You're an idiot.” This was like three years ago when I was still a dumb young kid. (laughs)

Maybe like two or three weeks later I did a Google search for my online name to see if anyone had been talk-

ing about the way I was playing on the online forums. I found a forum post where this guy posted the hand and didn't understand why I was berating him.

And he was wondering if he played the hand bad. He had all these responses of guys telling him that was a really, really bad play. Saying (I) can only have this type of hand there and you're definitely beat.

He didn't respond after that, but I'm sure he read the post and figured out how to play the hand better. He went out looking to figure out why he was wrong. So don't chat.

The last rule is to be confident. It's kind of the same concept as “Stay Positive” but being confident refers more to knowing you're one of the best players always at the table.

And just being confident that your hands are going to win when you have the best of it. Or even when you have coin-flips, to be confident that you're going to win and to just let it happen.

which he lost. So how does he take the news? By making the final table and pocketing another \$325K for his sixth-place finish. And he was far from being done. He made the final table of the WSOP Europe's pot-limit Omaha event in London and finished eighth for nearly \$50K.

“I can play almost every game,” he said. “I just learned how to play Badugi last night. (laughs) I think I can play every game, but maybe not profitably, necessarily. But PLO is definitely my favorite game, 100 percent. It's what I like to play if I'm going to play cash games. But in tournaments I probably have a better edge in no-limit hold'em.”

So, brimming with about as much confidence as a poker player can have, Mercier hung around London and entered the EPT's High Roller event, a.k.a. the Million Pound Showdown, and the buy-in was roughly \$30K. And that final table, Mercier's third in four events, was stacked: Peter Jetten, Michael Watson, Isaac Haxton, Isabelle Mercier, David Benyamine, Scotty Nguyen, Masaaki Kagawa and WSOPE Main Event winner John Juanda.

“It was pretty sick. When we got down to five-handed I realized that four of us had a first-place finish in the last six months and Peter Jetten was the only one who didn't, but he got second in a \$10K PLO tournament. So all five of us had had a sick, huge score in the past six months. It was a pretty sick final table, probably one of the sickest I had ever heard of.”

So he had to be intimidated, right?

“Not really,” he said, sans cockiness. “I don't think I was in-

timidated at all, to be honest. The stack sizes we were working with, the average stack was 25 big blinds, which is a standard online tournament. I was more worried about the online guys like Isaac Haxton and Michael and Peter than the guys I might be star-struck by like David Benyamine and John Juanda and Scotty Nguyen. (The online guys) have more experience with those stack sizes, just like I think I have an advantage over the live pros with those types of stack sizes.”

When it was all over, Mercier had edged Juanda for his second EPT victory in six months and another million-dollar payday. So what is it about Europe that Mercier loves so much?

“I think it's just coincidence,” he said. “I've played a lot of events this year in the States and there are a lot of big pots where I could have gone really deep had I won them. A lot of tournament poker is you're one hand away from a big score. I've won the hands in Europe and I've lost the hands in the States.”

All told Mercier has won nearly \$2.7 million in Europe. He's come a long way since playing for nickels and dimes, but did he ever imagine he'd be this successful?

“I did when I was really young, like 12-13, when I thought I was going to go to the NBA. (laughs) But it kinda started to sink in when I was grinding at an \$8-an-hour job when I was 16-17 that I wasn't necessarily going to be a millionaire by the time I was 21 like I had dreamed about. So I knew I was going to have to figure something out, so luckily I found poker and here I am today.”

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FLORIDA GAMING SUMMIT

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino • Hollywood • Oct. 6-7, 2008

Stories by Scott Long

If you ask Mike Mayo, columnist for the *Sun-Sentinel*, Florida's big gambling gaffe came more than 30 years ago.

Back before Atlantic City took hold. Before Las Vegas appealed to families. Mayo says a limited number of gaming licenses should have been auctioned off to the highest bidders, giving the state a generous revenue stream and, perhaps more important, control over a divisive issue.

"What should have been, with some proper vision from the political leadership and the business leadership, was to establish a vision of bringing gambling to Florida in a responsible, controlled way," Mayo said. "Too often, we have the logic butting heads with the political, and that's a real shame."

So here Florida finds itself in 2008, after one Band-Aid after another, with a patchwork of incremental gambling legislation that's left gambling operators crying for fairness and gamblers scratching their heads on how we got here. And how we'll get past it.

"We have a very confused Legislature," said Eric Rahn, CEO of Rahn & Associates, a gambling industry consulting firm. "They don't want to adopt a comprehensive gaming program. We need a comprehensive business model that's fair to all participants."

So under that backdrop, Florida gaming executives and more recently gathered at the Seminole Hard Rock in Hollywood for BNP Media's fourth Florida Gaming Summit to discuss where the Florida gaming market is ... and where it might go. Here are their stories.



FLORIDA GAMING SUMMIT

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, Hollywood, Oct. 6-7, 2008

SEMINOLE COMPACT: Answers elusive, questions mount

One year ago, Gov. Charlie Crist hammered out a gambling compact with the Seminole Tribe, a document the tribe had patiently sought for almost two decades, but governor after governor had refused to consider. Crist found himself in a different scenario, though, from his predecessors.

Voters had approved slot machines at Broward County parimutuels. Under terms of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988, Florida's largest Indian tribe now had a clear mandate to seek slot machines, too. Had Crist not decided to negotiate, the state risked that the U.S. Department of Interior would award the Seminoles slot machines anyhow ... and without revenue for the state. So Crist hammered out a deal that gave the Seminoles slot machines, as well as blackjack and other card games. The deal gave the tribe exclusive rights to those games in the state. And it ensured the state would be paid handsomely from the profits.

But the state Legislature had other plans.

"All compacts must go through the Legislature," said State Sen. Steven Geller, who for 20 years has been gambling interests' strongest ally in Tallahassee.

The Legislature sued, and a subsequent Florida Supreme Court ruling that seemingly nullified it has put the legality of the compact in doubt. But what the ruling means, like most everything else surrounding the compact, depends upon who you ask. The issues range from whether blackjack is allowed, to the role the 11th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution plays.

And with each passing day, the tribe's patience is being tested.

"If there's some frustration out there, it should be on our part," Jim Shore, the tribe's general counsel said, reminding competitors criticizing the tribe's enviable position of the long road the tribe has traveled.

Judith Shapiro, a lawyer who represents the tribe, drove that point home further.

"For people who talk about a level playing field in gaming in the state of Florida, please bear in mind, that for all these years, the Seminole Tribe has not had the benefit of the playing field authorized by the United States Congress," she said.

The Seminoles continue to deal their new games, though they recently said expansion of them to the Seminole Hard Rock Tampa would be delayed pending an outcome on the compact's validity. And the tribe continues to pay the state its share. The initial \$100 million payment the tribe made to the state? It remains in escrow, Shore said.

"There is no question that at this point, the best solution is for the state, and Legislature, the governor's office, and the tribe, to come to

an amicable solution," said George Skibine, an acting deputy assistant secretary at the Department of the Interior.

So how will that be accomplished? Geller, who is leaving the Senate because of term limits, laid out five scenarios:

1. Crist comes up with another compact on his own: "The court didn't say the governor doesn't have the authority to enter into a compact," Geller said. "It just said he didn't have the authority to enter into this particular one."

But Geller says this option is unlikely, since it would result in the same issues swirling around the current compact.

2. Crist takes the compact to the Legislature:

The Legislature's biggest beef was not being consulted, so this would address that concern. But passage is a different story.

"There is zero chance that the Legislature will approve it," said Geller, who said the Senate might be persuaded, but the socially conservative leadership in the House is firmly against it.

3. Do nothing: Geller is convinced if nothing is done, the National Indian Gaming Indian Commission, which has the power to shut down facilities if it deems they are operating games without a proper compact, will act within six months to a year.

"I think that would be terrible," said Geller, noting the Seminoles' active philanthropic activities. "They've been good corporate citizens, and they've been good citizens of the community."

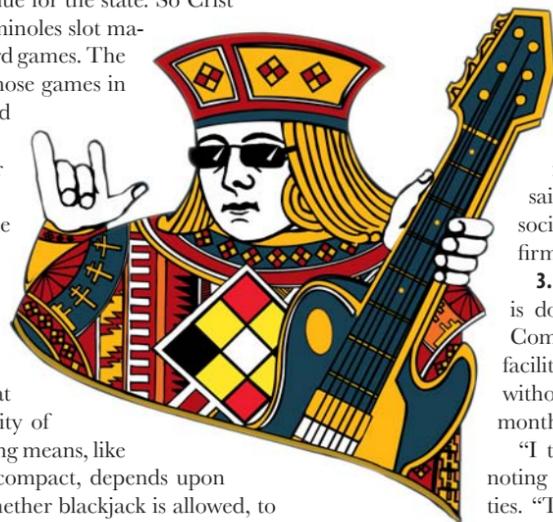
4. Let the Seminoles keep slots and table games, but give the same to Broward and Dade county parimutuels: Geller says the tribe could be given exclusivity on table games elsewhere in the state, save for permission for video lottery terminals at parimutuel facilities within 50 miles of the tribe's other casinos. But again, Geller says this scenario doesn't have legs, since it would have to get past the House leadership.

5. Give Seminoles Class III slot machines, but not table games: This is the scenario that Geller is actively pushing, and, based on his discussions with the governor's office and House leadership, he says, "I think there is a chance we can pass this."

Parimutuels would also realize some tax relief in the deal. But Geller says the tribe, banking on the status quo, might be the roadblock to success in this scenario.

But Shore, at least publicly, says the tribe remains open to negotiations.

"The tribe is ready to work with the governor and the Legislature and do what we can to see how we can keep these things moving forward," he said.



"There is no question that at this point, the best solution is for the state, and Legislature, the governor's office, the tribe, to come to an amicable solution."

— George Skibine

acting deputy assistant secretary at the Department of the Interior

FLORIDA GAMING SUMMIT

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, Hollywood, Oct. 6-7, 2008



An artist's rendering of the \$40 million Flagler project, which began in August.

PARIMUTUELS: Reinventing to remain relevant

Daniel Francati is likely the envy of his peers.

Parimutuel operators across the state freely admit their star attractions of yesteryear — greyhound racing, horse racing or jai-alai — no longer evoke the excitement of the masses that they once did.

But as president and general manager of the Daytona Beach Kennel Club, Francati presides over a sparkling, new \$30 million venue that his patrons gush over. Poker revenue is up. Simulcast revenue is up. Food and beverage revenue is up.

"We changed the environment," he said.

Confronted with an offer to buy its old facility, the track's parent company chose to gamble on building a new facility just a few miles away. It would be a facility where racing was no longer the top dog. The towering grandstands of other tracks weren't on the drawing board; instead, just a few tables that put fans very close to the action.

Francati wasn't completely sold on the potential of the gamble.

"I've been in greyhound racing for a long time, and building a greyhound track with no grandstand and somewhat diminished sight lines, I didn't think it was going to work," he said. "Actually, it has worked."

And the new top dog is poker.

"We were a greyhound track with a poker room," Francati said. "We're now a poker room with a greyhound track."

Francati's friends in the industry might not have the luxury of such a gamble (the sale of the former track allowed the new one to be built without financing), but it's clear that tracks have turned their attention to slot machines and poker.

"I believe the rest of the parimutuels in the state are barely hanging on," State Sen.

Steven Geller said of tracks that don't have slot machines, admitting even those with slot machines face steep challenges. "(Card rooms are) really the only thing keeping some of the parimutuels in the state alive."

Poker rooms have been a driving force for many of the state's parimutuel rooms, but few, if any, parimutuel operators would turn down slot machines, despite the onerous tax that comes with them.

Three more parimutuels — Flagler Greyhound Track, Miami Jai-Alai and Calder Race Course — will get in the slot game over the next year and half, thanks to Dade County voters' delayed approval. But the delay also let Dade parimutuels learn from the experience of their Broward counterparts, who have seen slot revenue fall well short of the projected \$400 per machine.

"I think the Broward tracks just underestimated the strength of the Seminoles," said Alex Havenick, a vice president for Southwest Florida Enterprises Inc., which owns Flagler, "and I also don't think they realized that people don't know who they are, that people didn't know that they existed."

Richard Thalheimer, president of consulting firm Thalheimer Research Associates Inc., agreed.

"Competition with the Hard Rock, I think, was greatly underestimated," he said.

James Allen, CEO of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, is quick to point out his casinos' success, though, comes from more than what people think.

"We certainly understand that there's a lot of people who believe we have an advantage here in Florida," he said. "But when you look at the overhead for a facility like this, compared to some of the racinos, we think we work a little harder, we think we work a little

smarter and we think that's what's led us to have so much success here in Florida."

While it's hard to compete with the Hard Rock, Havenick says it can be done.

"I think the Broward facilities missed the boat on other entertainment options," he said. "If you go into any of the Broward facilities past 7 or 8 o'clock at night, there's nothing going on, there's no entertainment. The bars are dead. They have no musicians or anything."

Havenick says the \$40 million Flagler project, which began in August, will boast 1,500 slot machines, 30 poker tables, a 3,500-seat amphitheatre and three or four bars and nightclubs when complete. The first phase is expected to open early in the third quarter of next year. And Havenick says the track will proudly promote its greyhound racing.

"We do believe it is an amenity that very few people can offer," he said.

Thalheimer's research backs it up. He says while he hasn't studied greyhound tracks or jai-alai frontons, his research shows that live horse racing boosts slot revenue 13 to 22 percent, more than making up for the racing revenue lost to slots.

Havenick also is intent on appealing to the different audience in Dade.

"There really is not a South Florida market. There is a Broward market, and there is a Miami-Dade market," he said. "We are 90 percent Hispanic. The wants and needs of the customers are very much different."

Daniel Licciardi, general manager of Miami Jai-Alai, which plans a first-quarter 2010 opening of the first phase of an overhaul of his facility, agrees.

"It's a hard-running, hard-gambling group of people who love to have a good time," he said.

FLORIDA GAMING SUMMIT

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, Hollywood, Oct. 6-7, 2008

THE ECONOMY: Can people really afford to gamble?

He's CEO of an Indian tribe whose Class II gaming was so successful it could afford to buy (and grow) Hard Rock — "the hottest brand in the world."

So successful that almost every day, a company contacts him, asking to put the Hard Rock name on its product. Or asks him to buy its struggling casino.

So successful that it is one of, if not the only, investment-grade gaming company left.

And he's worried.

"For the first time, the gaming industry is truly having some challenges," said James Allen, CEO of the Seminole Tribe of Florida. "Is it affecting us? Yes."

Toss out the notion of gambling as recession-proof.

With the housing market crumbling, lenders are tightening up the pursestrings. And that means casino projects, even those headline-grabbing behemoths, can't get financing. And it means Joe Gambler, struggling to hang on to his house, and fill up the gas tank, might not be visiting the casino as often, or bringing as much money when he does.

"The level of fear and paranoia as it relates to the economy in the gaming industry is unprecedented," said Joel Simkins, a senior analyst for Macquarie Capital USA.

"The fundamentals of the business are largely still intact. But the operators really need to brace for what could be the worst case scenario."

Among other things, Simkins says casinos may need to look at abandoning the thought of using restaurants as loss leaders, and instead outsourcing them or operating them at a profit.

"We're obviously in unprecedented times," said Dennis Farrell, a senior analyst at Wachovia Capital Markets. "Project financing in the United States is extremely difficult to come by."

Adam Picou, a managing director at KeyBanc Capital Markets, says some projects will still be built, though perhaps on a smaller scale. And he says the typical gaming customer hasn't been affected as strongly as one might think.

"The typical gaming customer is older, female, retiree," he said. "They actually are fine in this environment, because they only get hurt when there's inflation, not when people lose their jobs, because they're

already retired. They don't have a job to lose."

And despite his worry, Allen is bullish on the future.

"The one thing that the gaming industry has always been able to demonstrate is that it will survive," Allen said. He says eyes bigger than appetites is largely to blame for the current chaos.

"It's clearly due to overleveraged situations," he said. "People building things based upon ego, rather than building things that are practical."

And that theme is reflected in the three things he said his company is focused on going forward:

1. QUALITY

"We have focused on quality," Allen said, quickly adding that quality shines brighter in the total patron experience, not just on the price tag of a casino. "If you look at some of the casino projects being built, you ask yourself, 'Why?' Is it really that important to start spending 10, 20 million dollars on chandeliers?"

He pointed to the sky in the Hard Rock ballroom where he spoke.

"I don't know what we paid for them, but I promise you they are nowhere near a million dollars," he said of the chandeliers. "And you know what? Can everyone see? They do their job."

2. SERVICE

"I really think service in the United States has lost its way, tremendously," Allen said, relaying a story of how a German airline met him with a car on the tarmac, escorted him through customs and to his connecting flight after the inbound flight arrived late — a service the airline says it provides to all customers. He contrasted that with a malfunctioning airline kiosk, long lines and a confused cabbie after arriving back in the United States.

3. EFFICIENCY

"The reality is that you have to say, 'Do you absolutely need it?'" he said when evaluating purchases. "The economy is certainly challenging, but it has survived through times tougher than this one. The world economy will survive, and we'll be just fine."



FLORIDA GAMING SUMMIT

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, Hollywood, Oct. 6-7, 2008

PROBLEM GAMBLING: Help is just a phone call away

As gaming operators and everyday gamblers clamor for more gaming in Florida, the state's newest options, and perhaps a more pointed focus on awareness, is keeping Pat Fowler busy these days.

"What we're seeing is certainly an increase in calls," says Fowler, executive director of the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling, which operates the 1-800-ADMIT-IT help line. But more important to her, Fowler says, is the type of calls is different, with many more related to slot machines. And Fowler says a recent study of more than 2,000 college students in Florida shows new worries may be on the horizon.

State law mandates that parimutuels with slot machines work with the Council, including providing \$250,000 a year to help with problem gambling awareness. The rest of the state's venues who participate do it voluntarily. Fowler singled out Palm Beach Kennel Club's Arthur Laughlin for his efforts in advancing the voluntary program.

"We maintain a neutral position on gambling," Fowler says. "We're not a political organization that's interested in whether you should or shouldn't."

And that view is what helped cement the Seminole Tribe on beginning a close, voluntary relationship with the Council that goes back to before 1995, said John Fontana, president of the Seminole Hard Rock Tampa.

Fontana said the changing environment of gambling in the state is a challenge for problem gambling awareness.



"Poker, especially the way it's been marketed around the country, has drawn a much younger crowd, so we have to be vigilant in that area."

— John Fontana
Seminole Hard Rock Tampa president

Need help?

Call the Florida Council on Compulsive Gambling's 24-hour help line at 1-800-ADMIT-IT (1-800-236-4848), visit the Council's Web site at www.gamblinghelp.org.

"You have to be innovative, and try to stay in touch with where the issue is today," said Fontana, who announced a \$300,000 grant from the Seminoles to the Council to pay for a pilot treatment program. "Poker, especially the way it's been marketed around the country, has drawn a much younger crowd, so we have to be vigilant in that area."

Daren Nenortas, training manager for the Isle Casino at Pompano Park, said his property, like many, offers a self-exclusion policy, which allows guests to register to be banned from the premises. The program is detailed in signage and pamphlets available throughout the Isle, and all employees are trained to assist guests and look for signs of trouble. But timing is important, he said.

"Even if we could walk up to those guests that do have a gambling problem and offer them that information, maybe it wasn't that time for that person to hear that information. They haven't come to that realization yet," Nenortas said. "And by approaching them, we only send them into further decline."

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FLORIDA GAMING SUMMIT

Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, Hollywood, Oct. 6-7, 2008

THE FUTURE: Will Florida find its way on gambling?

Any discussion, any debate, any conversation about the future of Florida gambling hinges on just one word.

Taxes.

"For the gaming industry to grow and prosper in Florida, you're going to need more predictability, more stability and lower tax rates," said Joel Simkins, a senior analyst for Macquarie Capital USA.

The three parimutuels who have slot machines, and the three that plan to have them soon, are subject to an effective tax rate of more than 50 percent, once you break down how, and when, the tax is assessed. That makes the state's industry one of, if not the most, taxed in the country. And some say it's exactly what was expected.

"I said at the time that I knew, when Gov. Bush was pushing this through, he would push through something that was doomed to failure," said State Sen. Steven Geller, a gambling proponent who is leaving the Legislature this year after 20 years because of term limits. "I don't believe this was accidental."

The tax rate's painful bite goes beyond short-term profits.

"The high tax rate is a crucial problem for the racinos ... because it stifles investment," said Richard Thalheimer, president of consulting firm Thalheimer Research Associates. "And what the state might not understand is that (facilities) can make investment in amenities, such as a hotel, a pool, retail, things like that, that there would be an increase in slot money, which would go to paying back the reduction in tax rates."

And those amenities, which Thalheimer says could add 15 to 20 percent to slot revenue, are what gaming analysts say is needed to attract out-of-state gamblers.

"I think Miami has unbelievable potential to become a great gaming destination," said Dennis Farrell, a senior analyst for Wachovia Capital Markets, describing the city's style, hotels and international interest. "Destination gaming that has the infrastructure will succeed."

And becoming a "destination" for gaming is crucial, says Adam Picou, a managing director for KeyBanc Capital Markets. He says a "critical mass" of casinos, like found in Las Vegas, Atlantic City and Biloxi, is needed.

"Unless you can create that type of environment in Florida, it's still going to be the secondary reason for their visit," he said.

Quick history of Florida gambling

1931: State commission formed for horse, greyhound racing

1935: Jai-alai and slot machines approved

1937: Slot machines repealed

1970: Bingo approved

1979: Seminole Tribe begins high-stakes bingo

1984: Day cruises and simulcast wagering begin

1986: State lottery established

1996: Card rooms allowed at parimutuel facilities

2004: Slot machines allowed at designated facilities

Source: Rahn & Associates

And that brings us back to taxes.

The silver lining of the current economic woes might be a change in attitudes in Tallahassee. Picou says the state is in the top five of budget shortfalls in the country.

"I do think the Legislature eventually will be forced, from a budgetary standpoint, to give something to the Broward facilities," said Alan Koslow a gaming expert at the law firm of Becker & Poliakoff. "You can only go so long with a billion-dollar budget deficit."

Geller says because of the socially conservative House leadership, there's "a snowball's chance in hell of an expansion of gambling" in the state, but he says some relief is possible.

"Politically, I don't think they'll lower the tax rate, but I think they'll change the definitions of what you'll need to pay taxes on," Geller said, which may be enough to help Broward and Dade parimutuels get the dollars needed for investment.

And if the Legislature isn't interested in expanding gambling, that leaves the people. Koslow says there's chatter of another constitutional amendment brewing, and despite steep odds, he says it has a chance of success if supporters are willing to put in the hard work necessary.

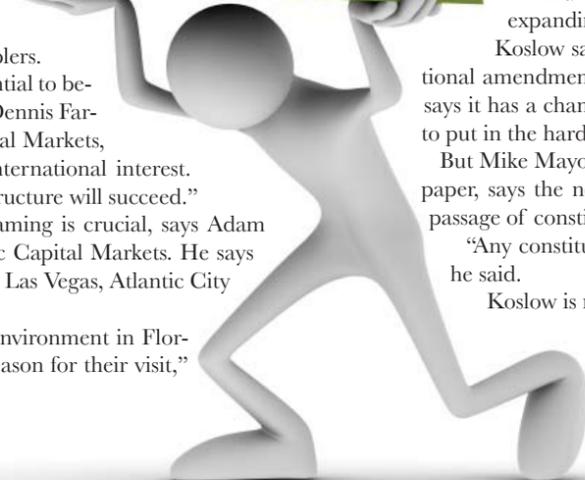
But Mike Mayo, a columnist for the *Sun-Sentinel* newspaper, says the new 60 percent approval threshold for passage of constitutional amendments is a tall order.

"Any constitutional amendment is likely doomed," he said.

Koslow is not deterred.

"Florida is still in its infancy of gaming," Koslow said. "It's only going to get better over time."

TAX



"Florida is still in its infancy of gaming. It's only going to get better over time."

— Alan Koslow
Becker & Poliakoff law firm

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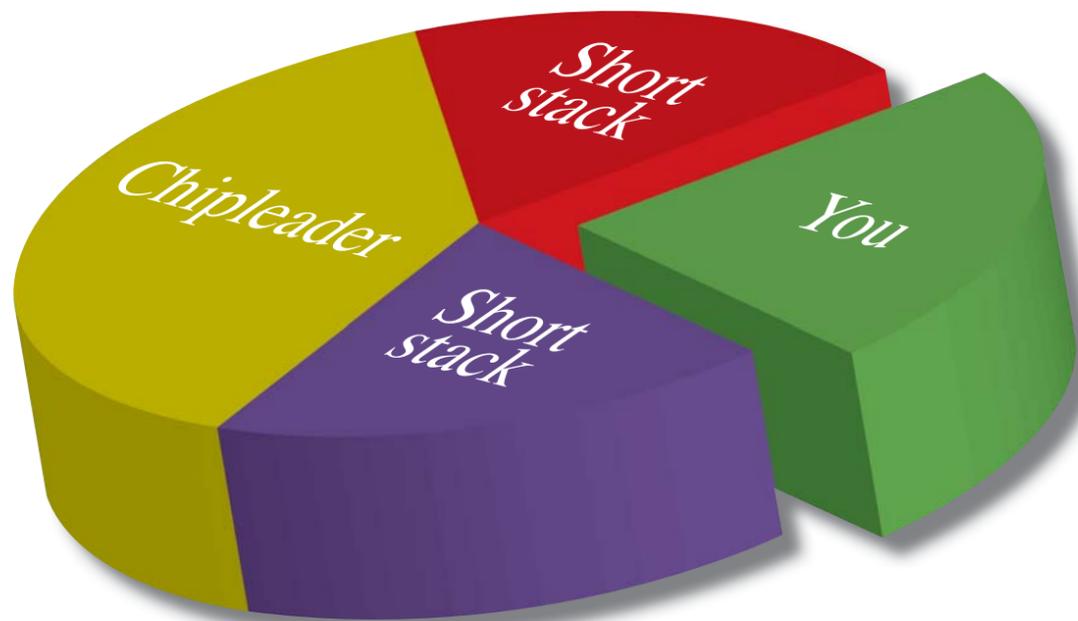
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WANNA CHOP?

Don't come out on the losing end of a deal. Be prepared to make sure you get your piece of the prize-pool pie!

BY CHRISTOPHER COSENZA

If you chop or not to chop, that is the question.

Whether you've played two days in a big buy-in tournament at the Seminole Paradise Poker Room at Hard Rock Hollywood, or you're heads-up with someone at the end of a sit-and-go at Ebro Greyhound Park, you want to make a fair deal for everyone ... but especially for yourself.

With so many tournaments being dealt these days chops are commonplace, and most times a poker room manager or floor person can handle the details to get you a good deal. But what if it doesn't work out that way? What if you're in a charity tournament or at a home game? Maybe the floor person isn't readily available and the other players are pressuring you to make a quick deal. Perhaps the offer on the table just doesn't feel right. You need to know some basic concepts to ensure you aren't being played.

First, let's discuss what a chop is. As its name infers, to chop means to split up the prize pool. Instead of playing to the bitter end of a tournament, sometimes players want to "lock up" a handsome portion of the money so they aren't victims of bad beats, variance or the quickly escalating blinds. Nowhere does this happen more than in SNGs. A lot of rounders play SNGs all day long and would rather move on to the next one than play out the current one for a few more bucks. So they offer to chop the prize pool.

But what if the stacks aren't even and someone broaches the idea of a chop and you aren't happy with their offer? What do you do then? You have to take into consideration all the information first. How many chips do you have? Are you the chipleader? Does anyone else at the table have about the same stack as you? Do they want to chop the entire pool or do they want to leave a little to play for? Are the blinds so high you aren't comfortable with the structure anymore?

And there always are intangibles. Do you feel you're the weakest player and a chop might be in your best interest? Or maybe you're the strongest player and think you'd win if you played it out. Is there something else at stake besides money, something you

Calculating a chop

- D** = Final deal amount for player
- X** = Chip count for player
- C** = Total chips in play
- T** = Total remaining prize pool
- M** = Min. payout for the next player out
- N** = Number of players remaining

Equation for a deal

$$D = (X/C) * (T - (M * N)) + M$$

can't really put a price on, such as a bracelet? Someone might be willing to take less money to secure the bling. You always hear people on TV say the money isn't important; it's the title or the bracelet that matters. Maybe your opponents care more about prestige than cash and you can reap the rewards.

These are all important factors in determining a chop. But once you've made the decision to chop you need to make sure you're not being swindled. We have provided a nice Clip-N-Save chart for you to carry in your wallet or purse in case this ever happens to you. But we'll explain it here.

In the chart you'll see an equation, or calculation, for arriving at a fair deal. Let's break it down and then plug in some numbers so it makes sense. You'll be able to do this for each player involved in the chop.

D represents the cash you'll take home once the calculation is complete.

X stands for your chip count.

C is the total chips in play.

T means total prize pool remaining.

M is the minimum payout for the next player eliminated.

N stands for the number of players left in the tournament.

Here's the calculation:

$D = (X/C) * (T - (M * N)) + M$. And remember, just like your high school algebra teacher told you, "Always do what's in parenthesis first!"

Divide your chip count (**X**) by the total number of chips in play (**C**). Let's call that

the portion number. Next, multiply the minimum payout (**M**) by the number of players left (**N**) and subtract that number from the total prize pool remaining (**T**) for the final prize-pool number. Are you with me so far? Take the portion number (**X/C**) and multiply it by your final prize-pool number. Lastly, add in the minimum payout (**M**) and you arrive at your chop amount.

Now let's plug in a real scenario and insert the numbers to give you a better understanding. You're playing in a 10-player turbo \$35 SNG (it's rake-free!), you each started with 1,000 chips and it's now three-handed. The tournament pays three spots and the total prize pool is \$350. First pays \$200, second pays \$100 and third pays \$50. You have 6,000 of the 10K chips in play and you feel everyone at the table is pretty even in skill level. You decide to channel Monty Hall and scream out "Let's make a deal!" Everyone agrees.

Here's how it would look:

$$D = (X/C) * (T - (M * N)) + M$$

$$(6,000/10,000) * (350 - (50 * 3)) + 50$$

or

$$(.6) * (350 - 150) + 50$$

or

$$(.6) * (200) + 50$$

or

$$120 + 50 = \$170$$

Remember, if you're in a multitable tournament and there were players who cashed in the lower spots, be sure that "T" represents the total prize pool remaining, and not the overall prize pool, since some of that money is gone already. Seems obvious, but you could get caught up in the excitement of the big money and will be puzzled when your calculations don't add up correctly.

To make things easier we used round numbers here, and you should, too. When doing your calculations at the table, feel free to fairly round up or down the player chip counts. If there are 100,000 chips in play and you have 71,350, it's OK to say you have 0.7 of the total chips. It will only make things simpler and maybe that nice gesture will pay off when you chop the next one. After all, deals are all about being fair.



A look at non-Texas Hold'em games — This month: OMAHA/8

DOUBLE YOUR PLEASURE WITH O/8B

Not happy with those two cards you were dealt? Would you be happier with two more?

That's what you get in Omaha, and it's quickly becoming a popular game. It's the game I play most now, and just as playing stud helps you keep track of cards, Omaha helps you focus on the nuts. Both skills are vital to improving your hold'em game.

Pot-limit Omaha is an action game favored by pros, and it's often played in high-stakes cash games. But Florida's laws dictate limit, so you're more likely to find the high/low version, called Omaha/8, in your local card room.

Omaha plays just like hold'em, except for the four cards in your hand. You must use two in your hand and three on the board to make the best possible five-card hand. And in Omaha/8, you may use different cards to complete your low hand than you do to complete your high hand. And this, my Holdout friends, is what drives beginning Omaha players crazy, and even frustrates veterans at times.

Dealt four aces? Restrain your glee. Far from having quads, you only have a pair of aces. And worse, a pair of aces that has no chance of improving to a set, a straight, a flush or quads. Likewise, if you only have one card 8 or lower, you have no shot at the low half of the pot. Remember — you must use two from your hand, and three from the board.

Got it? Let's move on to a little strategy.

LOW, LOW, LOW: In Omaha/8, two pots are awarded. Half to the highest hand, half to the lowest hand. (And if there's a tie, that pot is split again. This "quartering" is bad news. More on that later).

It's 8 or better, meaning three, unpaired cards 8 or lower must be on the board for a low to be possible (aces count as low and high). Read that again. And then read it a third time. You don't want to be the guy calling raise after raise for the low pot, only to find out a low pot doesn't exist.

You'll hear people get excited when they're dealt A-2. And, for the most part, they're right. As long as three, unpaired cards 8 or lower — and no ace or deuce — is on the board, these folks have the nut low. What happens if an ace or a deuce fall? Well, you've been counterfeited.

But you might still get the low, if the final board is four or five unpaired low cards. If you hear someone exclaim, "Live deuce!" this is what they mean. Remember, you use two cards from your hand, and three from the board. Count backwards, from the highest low card to the lowest. That's your hand.

And a side note: Table all of your hands. Often, the dealer — or even another player — will see that you have a winner that you didn't see.

Where to play

Most Florida card rooms offer Omaha/8, though at many you might only find a game on a particular day or time of day. Every Thursday is Omaha Day at Ocala Jai-Alai, and the second Wednesday of every month is Ante Up Omaha Night at Tampa Bay Downs. Call the Silks Poker Room (866) 823-6967 for details.

SCOOP, SCOOP, SCOOP: The object of all split-pot games is to win both pots, particularly with a \$5 rake and \$1 jackpot in the \$2/\$4 or \$3/\$5 game at your Florida card room. What that means is that you want a two-way hand. You want cards that can win the high pot and cards that can win the low pot. Some folks will say A-A-2-3 double-suited is the best starting hand because of this. You have two shots at the ace-high flush for high, as well as the three best low cards for the low (and a possible wheel). A classic mistake beginners make is betting with just a low, or worse, betting with just a low draw. In most cases, you want to be in check-call mode with nothing more than the nut low, or you'll risk being "quartered."

QUARTER, QUARTER, QUARTER, UM, QUARTER: If you've ever kissed your sister, don't go bragging about it unless she's Angelina Jolie. But you'll know what it feels like to be quartered. That's when you tie for the low (or high) with another player, while someone else takes all of the other pot. You'll rarely make money when quartered. It's common for two players to have A-2.

On the flip side, you can use this information to make a lot of money when you know you have the high, and two or more players are splitting the low. By raising, reraising and jamming, you get half of every bet tossed in the pot, while your two, tied low opponents will only get a quarter.

DRAW, DRAW, DRAW: Omaha is a drawing game. With two more cards in your hand, you'll often have multiple ways to improve. And if you don't, well, you're probably not the favorite in the hand, even if you have the current nuts. Having outs is called "backup" in Omaha, and it's important. Just

don't get too excited about all of those outs unless they are nut outs.

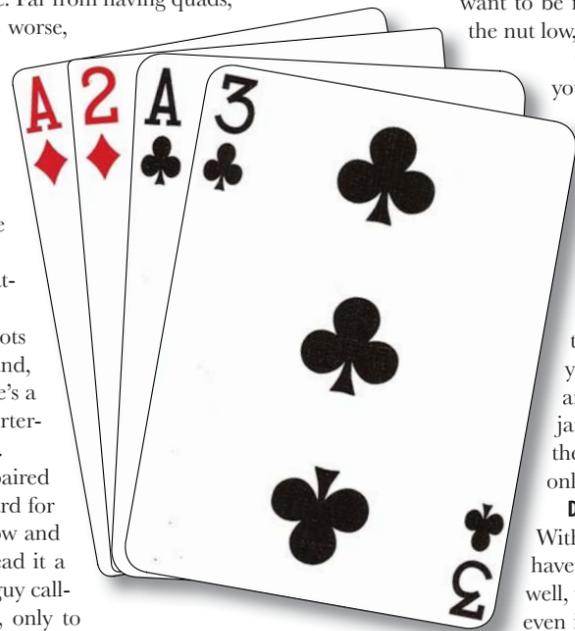
NUTS, NUTS, NUTS: Omaha is a game of nuts. Far too many Omaha players have crashed on the rocks of Second Best Hand Harbor.

While there are certainly times your hand can win without the nuts, it's a losing proposition to consistently pump money into the pot without the nuts, or worse, drawing to less than the nuts. After the flop, after the turn and after the river, I pause before I act and remind myself what the nut hand is. If my hand can't improve to beat that, I'll tread cautiously, and often even fold.

And don't be afraid to fold. Four new cards are coming your way real soon.



SCOTT LONG



LEE CHILDS • Learn to play the Acumen Poker way.

NEVER STOP ADJUSTING YOUR GAME

One of the biggest challenges for me as a professional poker player these days is constantly changing my strategies depending on the field I'm playing against. I play in such a wide variety of tournaments, from \$24 online tournaments to \$10,000 live main events, that I have to always be aware of my competition and usually need contradicting game plans for different players at the same table.



LEE CHILDS

I often play multiple tournaments online at the same time where I must use different strategies in the different tournaments, and I think this really helps me adjust my live game when I must do this for the various players at my table. For example, I often can be found playing a \$24 freezeout, \$30 rebuy and a \$100 one rebuy and one add-on tournament at the same time online. These tournaments have drastic differences in the quality of players and in my strategy.

In a \$24 freezeout, I'm not at liberty to think on too high of a level and try to represent hands that I don't have as much as I am in the \$100. In the higher-level tournaments, the field is full of strategic thinkers — players paying attention who can lay down hands when you're telling a betting story that implies they're beat. You

can represent flush draws that hit, put them on hands that probably cannot call you and overall make much higher level plays. Try to do this in a smaller tournament and try not to punch your monitor when you represent the flush draw that hits for you only to get called down by your opponent with third pair when you raise the river. It's very frustrating and something that has to be kept at the forefront of your mind at all times.

Playing in live tournaments requires the same awareness and discipline. I recently returned from two weeks in Las Vegas playing the Caesars Palace Classic series. I played in tournaments ranging from \$500 to \$10,000, including a heads-up and a six-max tournament. Each day I had to really think about my overall game plan for the tournament and then was forced to adjust based on my table draw.

There's a lot of talk these days about small-ball poker and a lot of players now trying to implement the style of play that players such as Daniel Negreanu have perfected and written about. Is that approach the right one for you or should you stick with a long-ball approach? It completely depends on your opponent. I strongly believe most intermediate players should err on the side of long ball as it just simply makes the game easier to play. As you get better with post-flop play, or when you know for certain you're matched against weaker players, you can take more of a small-ball approach.



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ACUMEN POKER

LEE CHILDS • Continued from previous page

As a poker player, you should naturally have a bit of an ego and feel you're a strong player. But, when you sit at a table, you must keep your ego in check and honestly evaluate how you stack up against the players at the table, then make your adjustments accordingly. In the smaller buy-in tournaments, I typically feel confident I'm one of the best players and will adjust my play. I'll utilize more small-ball poker and will work on setting traps. I try not to play big pots without the goods, but with the weaker players you just have to accept that sometimes they're going to fall right into your trap and get lucky.

Here's a hand from the \$1,500 event that I played at Caesars. With the blinds at 300-600 and sitting on an average stack of 27,000, I was dealt 10-10 under the gun. I raised to 1,800. The player to my left quickly called, as did the small blind (who had proved to be an erratic, weak player). The flop came J-10-7 rainbow and the small blind checked to me. I led out, as I typically would after flopping a set, for 3,400. The player to my left raised to 10,000 and, without too much hesitation, the small blind moved all-in for 25,000. At this point, I really thought both players held something like AJ or 77.

Sure, it was possible someone held JJ or 89, but I really felt my middle set was good. So, I went in the tank for a little bit before moving in myself as I want the UTG+1 player to come along. Sure enough, he did, and we flipped the cards to see UTG+1 show 77 for bottom set and the SB showed ... KQ?! Wow! This player called an UTG raise with KQ out of position and then check-raised all-in after a bet and a raise with his open-ended draw and absolutely no fold equity. I was baffled. A 9-ball came on the turn and my tournament was over. So, while unlucky, I made the right decision against a weak player and put myself in position to have a commanding chip stack down the stretch of this tournament.

The main event was more of a long-ball tournament for me. My first table was not too terribly strong, but I was moved in the third level to a very strong table: Alex Bolotin, Jared "TheWacoKid" Hamby, Matt Glantz and Chad "lilholdem" Batista of Coral Gables. Batista and Bolotin were eliminated during the next level, but Bolotin's seat was filled by J.C. Tran. Shortly after sitting down, Tran doubled up after flopping a straight flush with the 5♦6♦ and was paid off by a player with J♥J♥. He now had a big stack, but got involved in a lot of pots with Glantz, who got the better of him most of the time.

My strategy for this table had to change. I was playing with very experienced pros who have a great deal more live experience than me. I had to use my tight image to put in raises and reraises at opportune times and force these guys to play bigger pots against me. I finished Day 1 with just under an average chip stack, but survived against some of the best players in the game with timely aggression and taking them out of their comfort zone.

Tournament poker is so dynamic and every tournament you play requires you to make the proper adjustments. You are in control of the hands you play and how you play them. Do yourself a favor and take the extra time to really think about your situation at every table and every hand you play. Who are your opponents? What is the best way to play against the ones in this pot? How can you gain an edge or exploit the edge you already have? If you're honest with yourself about your abilities and your strengths and weaknesses, you can make the proper adjustments for success.

Decide to Win!
 — Lee Childs is founder and lead instructor of Acumen Poker. He also is an instructor with the WPT Boot Camp. Check out his site at www.acumenpoker.net.



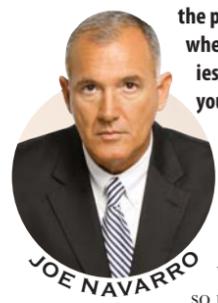
J.C. Tran

WHAT EVERY "BODY" IS SAYING

JOE NAVARRO • Ex-FBI guy shares his nonverbal secrets.

YOUR JOB IS TO BREAK THEIR PERSONAL CODE

Readers are invited to send Joe their questions regarding nonverbal tells to editor@anteupmagazine.com and we'll print the best letters.



JOE NAVARRO

When sitting down at a live game, should you concentrate on the people sitting to your left since they will be in the blinds when you're on the button, try to find the ones who are easiest to read, or try to read the players to your right since you will be out of position against them?

— nord1c

The best time to read tells are when a table is formed. A lot of nervous gestures will be manifest then because players are self-adjusting and nervous. When you join a game, tell yourself, "I have to ride this out for a few hands so that I can read the people all around me." To do otherwise is foolish, besides you should be folding about 60 percent of the time. I tell students to not only read the person making the call but also who is affected by that. There may be three other players down the line who will be elated, dejected or frozen. One other thing: Try to learn to read everyone, break their personal code, and if there's someone at the table you can't read, for whatever the reason, avoid any challenges and just play the cards and the statistics, don't try to guess their tells.

What are some books you recommend about nonverbal communication besides yours? They don't necessarily need to be poker-focused books.

— Steve in Tampa

Steve, thank you for your question. I think poker players who are interested in becoming really good at reading tells should invest the time in reading what is out there. Two books that are useful are Desmond Morris' *Peopewatching*, which is in paperback, and Peter Collett's *The Book of Tells*. Morris' book is excellent at deciphering cultural tells from emotional tells. Collett's book is not well-known but is full of useful information. I would also consider my latest book, *What Every Body is Saying*, as it contains important information that never made it into *Read 'em and Reap*. I'm a firm believer the best way to learn is from multiple sources and this may be a first start. Good luck.

COLUMBO TURNS THE PAGE

Solve the mystery.

WELL, WE MADE OUR HAND, BUT NOW WHAT DO WE DO?



"COLUMBO"

He checks.

It's time to make an appearance at the monthly no-limit hold'em league game and as usual no one can keep their guns in their holsters because we play six-max tables. I have disarmed one thug and have doubled up to 6K. Three seats fold and I'm on the button. The room is thick with the smell of beer as I look down at A♦6♣.

It's easy in six-max to justify a raise on the button, and I don't want to disappoint anyone. I raise 3x to 240. The SB folds, but the BB calls. I glare at his double-chip as we see a flop of T♣ 8♥ K♣.

What does scratching indicate? And is the location of the scratch significant? My boss scratches at the top of his hand and forearm a lot. He seems to do this when I ask him a difficult question or when I disagree with him.

— Nathan in Columbus, Ohio

Nathan, your question shows you're a detailed observer. Obviously we scratch when something itches, but quite often we scratch to pacify us because we're nervous. When stressed or nervous, our hairs stand up and there are minute muscle movements that prepare us for flight or fight. Which is why we see people often scratching their heads, literally, when trying to figure out a problem. Whether on the head or on the arm, or on the side of the face, it is all the same thing: It is a pacifier indicative of stress, doubt, insecurity and or weakness.

I'm actually reading *Read 'em and Reap* right now. What differences occur when a player is drunk/tired/talking to a friend? And if a person is showing their cards to a rail bird, what kind of tell can you get from that situation?

— Zorag, via anteupmagazine.com/forum

Zorag, first of all, thank you for reading the book. I hope it leads you to the final table. In the meantime, I have to say poker players should be like athletes: no drugs or alcohol while playing. Any drug or substance that alters your ability to observe or affects your central nervous system, no matter how slight should be avoided during tournament play. You may not think it affects you, but it does. As to talking and other distractions, they're just that, a distraction. I see players playing poker while talking to the girlfriends, while watching ESPN, and listening to their iPods. Some players can pull it off in cash games, but you won't see it in major tournaments. Why? Because tells are too important. In teaching with Phil Hellmuth and Greg Raymer, they have told me nonverbals (tells) can play as much as 70 percent of their game. I hardly think it's possible to win a tournament while distracted. So I would say, avoid the distractions.

— Former FBI counterintelligence officer Joe Navarro of Tampa specialized in behavioral analysis for 25 years. He is star lecturer with the WSOP Academy and has penned *Read 'Em and Reap*, which you can find on Amazon.com. Email Joe at editor@anteupmagazine.com and he'll answer your questions about nonverbal behavior.

Despite the texture of the board, I am going to C-bet a big blind caller almost every time. After careful deliberation, I bet just under the size of the pot. He surprises me with another call.

The turn pairs the board with the 8♠ and he checks. Despite his calling line, I slow down and check behind. Let's face it; I'm not exactly wielding a big weapon here.

The river is the A♥ and he comes out firing a pot-size bet of 880.

The moment is tense as I sit back in my chair and think through the action on the previous streets. It's then I make up my mind.

If you think I call, go to Page 15

If you think I fold, go to Page 40.

— Columbo has a weekly mystery on the Ante Up Poker Podcast at anteupmagazine.com.

DR. FRANK TOSCANO • A look at how to stay healthy at the poker table.

AWAY FROM THE TABLE, HELP YOUR MIND RELAX

You're in the zone. You have a great read on the table bully and he falls head first into your subtle trap. He looks confused and stunned when you take down the hand. As the dealer passes you the sugar, deep within the pleasure center of your brain, thousands of neurons squirt out little jets of dopamine. You sigh with contentment. Your heart rate and blood pressure go up just a little. All is right with the world.

Except the hand occurred more than three hours ago and you're actually in your bed trying to get some sleep while that hand keeps playing over and over again in your head. Each time you spring your trap in your imagination the dopamine surge makes it feel good all over again.

You smile with satisfaction against the pillow but still can't sleep. So, because it feels good, you set it up in your head and play it again.

What's going on here and how do you stop it?

Unless you make your living playing poker, it's probably those little surges of dopamine pleasure that keep you constantly coming back to the game. The feeling is a bit

like launching a 3-pointer from NBA range, or chipping out of a deep bunker and stopping inches from the cup. The feeling is exhilarating, addicting. The problem is you don't want exhilaration. You want sleep. Here's how you can get it.

It's tempting, of course, to play out satisfying hands in your head because that little burst of pleasure feels great even hours later. Resist for two reasons. First, the degree of mental alertness required to set up the trap in your head interferes with the neuronal "power-down" needed for sleep. And second, the dopamine pleasure surge is a neuro-stimulant. Its effect is similar to a tiny snort of cocaine or crystal meth. ... not exactly a state of mind that's conducive to sleep. Just so that there's no confusion on this point, let me be clear: cocaine/crystal meth = bad thing; squirt of dopamine = not a bad thing.

Instead, if you really want to think about poker as you drift off, think of a simple repetitive action that requires little or no brainpower on your part, like dealing cards or shuffling chips. Even if you're not a dealer or a chip-shuffler, imagine you are and visualize the action over and over, again and again.

It's a rhythmic action that requires no mental setup and has no dopamine payoff in your brain. There's a reason insomniacs have traditionally counted sheep and not Hooters girls. As you begin to get sleepy, it's much easier to eventually let go of the visualization (of the chip shuffling, not the girls) and drift off to sleep.

A similar situation occurs when you've been running bad. You punish yourself at the poker table for bad decisions, and continue in bed by releasing neurotransmitters, this time a different chemical in a different area of the brain, but the effect is the same. In bed you replay the hand in your head and then chastise yourself with a sensation of regret. No sleep for you, bad boy.

There are a few other strategies you can use. First, try better to control your emotional investment at the table. Good beats and bad beats happen and you should just focus on making the best decision every time, not the outcome. In other words, don't tilt, good or bad. Most of us who aren't Bobby's Room regulars may still have some work to do to control that particular aspect of our game.

Second, watch what you consume at the table. Where I play the coffee is strong, bitter and loaded with caffeine (up to 200 mg - the same as NoDoz). And it's not just the coffee. All manner of super-cafeinated "energy drinks" (100-300 mg) are available that will irritate your stomach, speed up your heart and cause your brain to ruminate for hours. Even colas can have 55 mg. Stick with decaffeinated drinks, or just plain water.

So, unless you're playing poker to pay your rent, relax. Enjoy the game. Try to remember what you did well and poorly at the table so your game can improve, but leave the exhilaration or regret behind when you leave. Avoid the many forms of caffeine available in your poker room. And when you hit the bed, forget about the perfect (or terrible) hand you played. Shuffle some chips and get some sleep.

— An avid poker player, Frank Toscano, M.D. is a board-certified emergency physician with more than 28 years of front-line experience. He's medical director for Red Bamboo Medi Spa in Clearwater. Email your poker-health questions to ftoscano@redbamboomedispa.com



FRANK TOSCANO M.D.



Can't sleep after that bad beat? Try imagining yourself dealing. That will put anyone to sleep.

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Ante Up, the longest running poker show on the Internet, is still cranking out the best podcast on the planet. Tune in Fridays at anteupmagazine.com or subscribe on iTunes for free. And just in case you haven't heard our latest shows (how dare you!) here are some recent highlights.

THE SEAT OF POWER

Chris: It looks a little less suspicious when you're raising from the cutoff seat ... because when you're raising from the button it looks like you're just stealing because of the blinds. But now, every year we seem to progress. Now there's the hijack seat, which is two to the right of the button ... this looks even LESS suspicious than the cutoff. ... next year three seats (from the button) will be called ...

Scott: The assassination seat! We start with under the gun, then we go to cutoff and then hijack. What's left? We do assassination and then it might be execution after that? And then pretty soon it's going to be full circle to under the gun. Then what do you do?



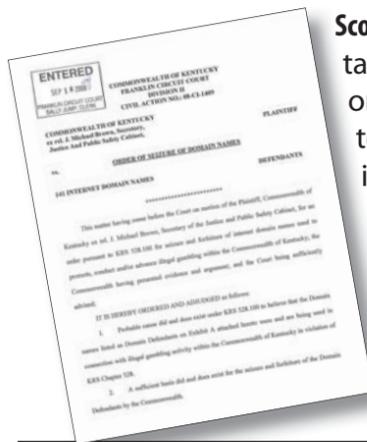
Ante Up listener and magazine subscriber Jason Mollett, aka Zorag, poses with his daughters, Heidi, 5, on the left, and Megan, 7, in Bernalillo, N.M.

And what's that the girls are holding? Why it's the coveted Banana Trophy given to winners of our monthly Ante Up Intercontinental Poker Series, aka A.I.P.S.

Zorag won our 7-card stud/8 or better event. If you'd like to participate in our tournament series and win a precious piece of plastic fruit just tune in to our Ante Up podcast for all of the details on anteupmagazine.com. You can still enter our Main Event H.O.R.S.E. tournament on Dec. 18.

Also, if you'd like to send us a photo of yourself with an AIPS banana or a copy of Ante Up, send it to editor@anteupmagazine.com and we might just publish it.

MASTER OF ALL DOMAINS



Scott: Kentucky's governor wants to take control of 141 domain names of online gambling sites and give them to the state because they're infringing on his Kentucky laws."

Chris: What? ... Sounds like someone's mother didn't love him and he's looking for attention.

Scott: And his main reason is it's siphoning money from Kentucky's gambling!

Columbo Turns the Page, continued from Page 37

So what did you deduce? You think he outkicks you from the big blind? Then why not raise back at some point?

You think he held QJ and the ace made his hand? The problem is the way he played the hand: always willing to call, never willing to push the issue. If I have QJ there (assuming they're not both clubs), I'm not going to let a weak hand get to showdown without firing a shot somewhere. And if it does hit, why would I think that a pot-sized bet would get paid off when we both checked the turn? Nah, I think he is probably stuck. Not much makes sense here. The way he played it makes it difficult to pin anything on him. And that's when the big river bet looks suspicious. Still, we fold and he shows J♣9♣. We've made mistakes before and live to fight another pot.

Correspondence with the Ante Up Nation

Bubble boy renamed

I am working hard at work listening to your podcast and the discussion about Scott's adventures on the bubble and felt the need to share with you that we have a guy in our regular game for which we renamed that position. We normally play three SNGs a night for which we pay three spots, which made the bubble fourth. This guy finished in that position so often that we now call him Quattro, which is also used amongst us to indicate a bubble finish.

Scott D. Rodgville
Elkridge, Maryland

Thanks for Ante Up

I just wanted to say thank you guys for bringing out the highlights of poker here in Florida.

VERBAL IS BINDING
Got something to say? Email us at letters@anteupmagazine.com and be sure to give us your name and hometown and we'll print it.

Your stories about all the poker facilities are most interesting. I visit the poker room at the Naples/Ft. Myers Greyhound Track a couple of times a week. Keep up the great reporting. Thanks.

John Henry
Naples

I've read your magazine and the articles are

informative, and I like the fact that you do show a lot of events in the Florida area. I never knew about the WPT satellite boat on the other coast until I picked up your mag. (Now I'm trying to make plans to follow through, all I can do is give it a shot.)

Hector Acuna
Tampa

I enjoy your magazine; it's no nonsense. I read them all, *CardPlayer*, *Bluff*, *All-In*, *Poker Pro*, etc., but here's what I like about *Ante Up* ... I love the fact if I forget to pick it up, or lost an older issue, you publish it in archives (at anteupmagazine.com). You can't imagine how many times I threw away something that I would never need again only to need it tomorrow.

Buzzy
via email

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AMATEUR POKER ON TV MISSES POINT

The dog days of poker viewing are upon us. ESPN's World Series of Poker coverage concluded Nov. 11; NBC's *Poker After Dark* broadcast Season 4's final episode Thanksgiving week; Season 5 of Game Show Network's *High Stakes Poker* is only now being recorded with a possible airdate in January; and Fox Sports Net's debut of the *World Poker Tour's* Season VII is yet to be determined. What's a Poker TiVo Junkie to do?

I suppose I could watch the latest season of FSN's *Best Damn Poker Show* to get me through this viewing lull. (Yeah, right.

I'd rather have my eyes sewn open and let Chris "Jesus" Ferguson take aim at me one card at a time from a deck of KEMs.) Of course I could actually do something productive and walk a few miles every night to burn off that couch-potato bulge that's been torturing my pants button these past few months. Nah! We know *that's* not going to happen!

So now what?

Well, squeezed into the FSN-WPT agreement is another TV show called *ClubWPT.com*

that debuted in early October. American and Canadian players from the subscription-based ClubWPT.com site earn one of six seats during the week and are flown to Los Angeles — They get to stay at the Four Seasons! — to play in what amounts to a winner-take-all turbo no-limit hold'em sit-and-go.

The structure, in true WPT-televized style, is insanely fast, and the payoff is \$5,000 to the winner. This concept is nothing new. FSN and Mansion-Poker.net did virtually the same thing a ways back, but that was around for just one season before the site pulled out of America because of the Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act.

The idea is to give Average Joe or Jane a chance to play on TV and win some decent coin — Howard Marsee of Oviedo recently won one of these matches. But I have to wonder if this truly is the dream of the average player. When I think of playing on television I think of earning a seat at the final table of a prestigious event, such as a WPT main event or a WSOP bracelet event. The fact that I had beaten some of the best players in the world to earn the right to be on television, that I'd be playing for an important title and life-changing money is what makes it "the dream." I'm not saying if I had the chance to play in one of these made-for-TV specials I wouldn't do it, but it just doesn't fit the criteria of chasing the dream for me.

But, as a viewer, this sort of show makes me pine for an afternoon waiting in line at the tax collector's office. There's a huge flaw in putting six amateur poker players on TV: We don't care. And why don't we care? Because we don't know these people, and for the most part they're terrible.

There are two main reasons people watch poker on television: entertainment and knowledge. No one is going to be entertained by these people because even if we did like them or find them amusing, we'll never see them again. When we watch the WSOP or *HSP* we know the featured players. We tune it to see how they're playing, or in the

case of Phil Hellmuth and Mike "The Mouth" Matusow, we watch to hear what they'll say next. But to pit six unknowns every week and ask us to invest time in them knowing they aren't very good and we'll never see them again is asking a bit much. That kind of hit-or-miss broadcasting is very risky, and certainly not worth an hour of my time every week. I originally got a Season Pass to this series, but have since cancelled it. Maybe walking at night wouldn't be so bad after all.

Random thought: *Poker After Dark's* Mori Eskandani and his crew continually try to come up with interesting matchups or themes for the week. Past themes included World Champions, 19th Hole (players who also are known for playing high-stakes golf), International Week, Bracelet Winners and Mayfair Club (players who frequented this underground New York poker room back in the day). These were naturals, though not every one made for good television. Mayfair week featured some insightful stories of yesteryear, but the poker and pace were just dreadful. Other themes were a real stretch, such as Jam Up Week, which supposedly featured players who are loose and like to jam the pot. But to have Howard Lederer and Barry Greenstein in that lineup was laughable. And Gus and the Ladies Week? What the hell was that? The flirting at the table was nauseating to say the least. Or Cowboys Week with Andy Bloch, Gabe Kaplan and Chau Giang? Are you kidding me?

I have some suggestions for Season 5, if there is one. First, lose the themes. They were cute in the beginning, but for the most part they don't work. Just put together great personalities and the rest will work itself out. I liked that they mixed it up and threw in two cash-game sessions and a heads-up week this past season. These were steps in the right direction. Continue with more cash games, perhaps more players and larger buy-ins as well.

When we had Eskandani on our Ante Up Poker Podcast we asked him if he'd ever consider doing a mixed game show, perhaps a H.O.R.S.E. tournament, and he shot us down saying it's hard enough keeping the public interested without confusing them with explaining all of the games, etc. I can agree with him to a point, but I

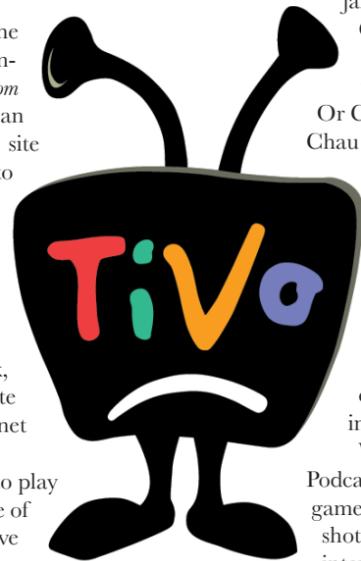
think the H.O.R.S.E. coverage on ESPN was stellar and the explanations weren't intrusive. What about featuring the game that's sweeping the country now? Pot-limit Omaha. The game is as simple as hold'em only with more cards. If poker on television is going to continue to be successful someone is going to have to try something different to grab a whole new crop of viewers.

And if you insist on the themes might I suggest a couple? Try Andy and the Corporation Week and make it limit hold'em. Ask billionaire Andy Beal to play against the Brunsons, Jennifer Harman, Phil Ivey and Howard Lederer and make the buy-ins total at least \$1 million. And, of course, have Michael Craig in the booth with Ali Nejad.

If that doesn't do it for you how about Poker Podcasters Week? Scott Long and I will gladly take on Phil Gordon, Joe Sebok, Gavin Smith and Nejad. That would make for some interesting television I guarantee it. Now if only we can find a sponsor for our \$20K entries. — **Email me at chris@anteupmagazine.com and tell me how you'll be spending your downtime away from the poker tube.**



CHRIS COSENZA



MAD PROPS

By Christopher Cosenza

Ante Up Staff Writer

Mike Caro would agree his personality is as split as Omaha/8 or better. He admits in the original *Super System* he's a regular "Jekyll and Hyde." His unorthodox mannerisms at the table are as calculated and precise as the thousands of statistics and odds tables he's manually compiled through the years.

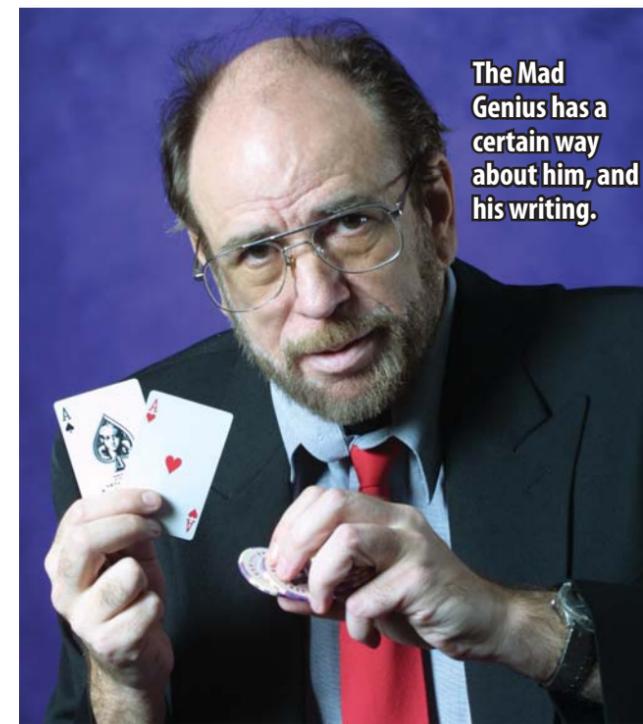
And his writing style is no different.

Caro's latest effort, *Caro's Secrets of Winning Poker*, is essentially the fourth edition of *Caro's Fundamental Secrets of Poker* (1991), but with some additions to include the hold'em craze, among other things: "I've decided to yield to the voice of the players and acknowledge that hold'em is the hottest poker game going right now," writes the draw poker savant on page 112. He then offers significant advice on the game. But the Mad Genius of Poker (a nickname he gave himself decades ago for obvious reasons) resurfaces with some of the most entertaining analogies pen has ever put to paper, comparing preflop play to trying to pick up a woman at a party.

"There's a woman standing a few feet away that you crave. Let me define the word 'crave' in the present context. Crave means you want to lure her to your apartment and have sex. That's what crave usually means, right?"

Only Mike Caro could use this comparison in a poker book and not only get away with it, but use it so perfectly that it eventually hammers home the axiom beautifully. Essentially he says there are many different ways to try get her to talk to you and follow you back to your place. He says it's the same with poker. When you have pocket aces, you want to choose a path that will work best for your current situation and get your opponent to do exactly what you want to succeed. Brilliant stuff.

There are times in the book, like most poker publications, where you might find yourself skimming, either because the content is repetitious (something he intentionally does to enforce his important points) or too basic (he readily admits he hated putting in the chapter that explained the rules of each game). You easily could breeze through this book on a flight to Vegas or one lazy afternoon at home. But it's full of concepts and life lessons that should be revisited over and over again. Caro uses "blackboards" throughout the book to highlight the important theories he's compiled through years as a leading poker writer and instructor (Mike Caro University of Poker is his baby), and these blackboards make it easy to



The Mad Genius has a certain way about him, and his writing.

grasp the essential theme of the section.

He also can raise an eyebrow or two when his theories fly in the face of conventional poker instruction. "One of the most consistent misconceptions about poker is that you should quit when you lose more than a preconceived amount of money. Poker doesn't work well with that philosophy." What does he mean? You'll have to read the book. And he doesn't stop there, insisting that limping in hold'em generally is the way to go rather than raising from early position because most of the time you'll be disappointed with the flop. He makes a compelling argument for a strategy that goes against just about every poker book ever written.

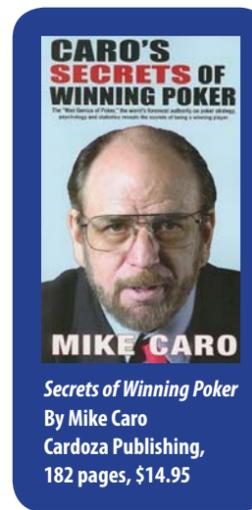
Though Caro's legacy will be as the best draw poker player in history and the author of the *Book of Poker Tells*, he only dedicates one brief chapter (to be fair, most chapters are short in this book) to each of these strengths. After all, it is a book about winning poker, not tells or draw. Later on he lists 15 tips he believes are "worth at least \$2,500 a year to any middle-limit serious competitor who plays poker several times a week." If he's right, then the paltry \$14.95 you need to shell out for *Secrets* is a mere drop in the bankroll bucket.

Here's a gem from the tips list, and he calls it Caro's First Law of Poker Conduct: "If they're helpless and can't defend themselves, you're in the right game." And it's this kind of wisdom -- not numbers and probabilities -- that flourishes in the Cardoza Publishing product. Other chapters include bankroll management, general winning advice and strategies for stud games and tournaments.

Though he likes to profess that winning poker is all about skill, he wraps up the book with an affirmation he uses at the end of all of his seminars. He makes his students say it three times.

"I am a lucky player. A powerful winning force surrounds me."

If you believe it, then others will believe you're lucky, too, and they'll be intimidated and play poorly while you remain confident. It may seem to contradict Caro's theories that are rooted in hard evidence and research, but then again, would you expect anything less from the Mad Genius?



Secrets of Winning Poker
By Mike Caro
Cardoza Publishing,
182 pages, \$14.95

Q&A

WITH "THE MAGICIAN"

By Christopher Cosenza

Antonio Esfandiari, the face of the WPT, took time away from the ladies to tell *Ante Up* about the hottest place to party in Vegas, the sickest prop bet he ever made and his desire to bust Phil Laak.

Someone, and I can't reveal my sources, but someone once told me the real reason you changed your first name from Amir to Anthony and then later to Antonio was to improve your chances with the ladies. Is that true?

That is not true. The reason why I changed my name from Amir to Anthony was because when I was younger in school I got picked on a lot. I just wanted to have a more American name where I wouldn't get needled so much. Then when I went from Anthony to Antonio, Antonio was more mystical. Antonio the Magician vs. Anthony the Magician because I used to do magic for a living.

We often see you performing tricks with cards and chips. Do you ever miss those days as a professional magician?

No, I don't say I'm a magician anymore, but I still do magic for friends and family and groups of people what not. For the most part I'm a poker degenerate.

Were there any lessons learned as a professional magician that ultimately made you a better poker player?

That's a good question. No specific skills, but I did magic for so many people, I learned human traits. I learned the way humans react when they get excited, when they're confused, when they don't know how something is done. So I think in essence I learned just natural human behavior from doing magic, and seeing the reactions I got. That might have helped with my ability to read people later on down the line in poker. So (not) because of cards did my poker ability go up, but because of human traits and seeing how they react I think I learned a lot. ... I spent like 12 hours a day every day for two years, practicing, I kid you not, morning till night I was practicing.

Anyone who has seen you on television knows you like to have a good time. Where's your favorite place to party these days?

Tao night club in Las Vegas. It's just fun. There's an area in the middle of the club like a catwalk kind of a thing, right in the middle of the club like right by the VIP tables, VIP section. I'm friends with owner of the club, and no guys are allowed to dance up there, it's just all girls. From the moment the club starts to the end of the night there's like 20 girls going through there all the time. And since I'm



friends with the owner I can go up there and I have my bottle of Patrone in my hand, I'm like drifting around, talking, dancing, whatever. And it's just like no other guy is allowed up there so ... it doesn't hurt the matters when you're the only guy allowed up there. But I don't want that to come off in like a Chiachi way. Just the way I get treated because my friend owns the club. Also depends on the night of the week. I love the Bank Night Club at the Bellagio. Bank and Tao are my favorite spots. It just depends on the night. If you want I can give you the rundown of every night (laughs).

No that's OK. Speaking of having a good time, how did I Bet You with Phil Laak get started?

Literally Phil and I used to play poker all of the time and some guy was like "Dude, you guys are hilarious together. You guys should have a TV show where you walk around and bet on everything." And we're like "Yeah, cool, make it happen." You know? ... Somehow it got transferred to our agent, our agent got a hold of this production company, next thing we know they have this

idea for us, we go to New York to do this little one-hour pilot making bets, eight months later they sell the show to a network and somehow you have *I Bet You*. We couldn't believe that it actually happened because these things people are always like "Oh yeah we have this idea" but nothing ever actually happens.

I hear it's in limbo. Would you do a Season 3 if a network picked it up?

We're filming it right now. We've already shot four episodes and we're shooting another one in about a week and a half. We made a bet about a month ago about who is more full of ... um, I don't know how to explain this. You know how Phil and I are always B.S.ing each other. So we're sitting there and I'm like "Your full of shit." And he goes "No, you're full of shit." And we make a bet on who was more full of shit and went and got a colon cleaning. So that'll be I think the funniest episode that we've ever shot when it comes out. ... We're definitely filming the whole season.

How sick do you feel when you lose a bet or even a pot to him?

It hurts. It really hurts. Stings. Phil and I are so competitive. Outside of our show and at the poker table just in life in general, we just

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want to beat each other so bad it's the most insane twisted friendship you've ever seen. It really hurts.

Is there ever any amount where you'd feel bad that you took it from Phil?

Nope, if I busted Phil, if I broke him for his net worth I would text-message him like "Life is good." There's no sympathy. When my net worth was \$30,000, he offered me a flip for like \$35,000 to \$30,000 because he wanted to break me and set me back to zero. That's how sick we are.

Have you gotten over Phil meeting Jen Tilly?

He left me, it hurts, but you know what? They're in love and I'm happy for them. In the end you want your friends to be happy. As much as I get less time with him because of Jennifer and what not. They're very happy together and that's all that matters.

What's the sickest prop bet you've ever made?

I mean, I'd have to say we made a bet on who's the most full of shit. You know, we made a bet who had more potent sperm. Those are some pretty sick bets.

How much cash do you have on you right now?

Like literally with me like on my body?

Yeah, like on you right now.

Zero.

Does that mean you don't always have to be ready for an action bet?

I mean, I'm at home in my underwear. ... I have access to friggin', you know, a lot. But not like in the next 30 seconds.

You've been a celebrity for a while now so you're probably used to it, but what goes through your mind when you see yourself on TV doing the wave in front of Hellmuth or Hollywooding it up on HSP?

That's a very good question and I'll be honest with you, when it first started happening when I first started being on television it was the

coolest thing in the world. I would want to watch and see what happened and this and that. And after a while, and I don't mean to sound (unappreciative), but in life you always want what you can't have. And once you have a certain level of anything, you desire it less. And not to say I'm famous by any means because I don't consider myself a celebrity on any level. I mean maybe I'm known in the poker world a little

bit. You know, I may get recognized a few times when I go out but by no means would I call myself a celebrity. ... Nowadays, if I see myself on TV, it's cool don't get me wrong, but it's not like "Oh my God I'm on TV."

What's the deal with bad beat stories with you not ever telling one?

I just have a certain philosophy on life in general, and that is if something bad happens to you and there's nothing you can do about it, why let it stress yourself out? Why let it get to you, why let it bring you down? Life is too short. I don't let anything affect me. A bad beat happens, and you lose with the best hand, what can you do? You're just gonna sit there and mope

about it and cry about it and tell people? That's just negative energy. You're not gonna get your money back by crying about it. So why in the world would you ever tell someone a bad-beat story. The fact that you can shower in the morning and eat when you're hungry crushes the fact that you just got a bad beat because life is not a bad beat if you can do those things.

All we know about you is what we see and hear on television. Is there one thing people would be surprised to know about you?

I'm extremely family-oriented, very close to my father, my mother and my brother. One of these days I'm gonna throw in my player card find a wife and have babies.



Laak and Esfandiari on // Bet You.

Photo courtesy MOJOHD.com

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