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the INSIDE STRAIGHT

News, Reviews, and Interviews From Around the Poker World

Social Media Gloating Prompts Phil Galfond To Take Up Mike Postle Cheating Case

By Steve Schult

Respected pro and online poker site operator Phil Galfond plans to compile every hand played by alleged poker cheater Mike Postle and give a detailed analysis of his play. He hopes that his findings will help definitively prove whether Postle cheated a low-stakes cash game out of a reported six figures.

The high-stakes cash game crusher and owner of three WSOP bracelets is taking up the cause after watching the casino's tournament director, and Postle's alleged accomplice, Justin Kuraitis, take a "victory" lap on social media.

"I'm a busy guy," wrote Galfond. "I probably wasn't ever going to think about Postle again, but [Justin Kuraitis] and [Stones Gambling Hall] responded to a legal 'victory' by taunting the victims."

After most of the 88 plaintiffs accepted a settlement, conditional on a statement saying that there was no evidence to prove that Postle was cheating or that the casino or its staff were involved, Kuraitis released a four-page statement that lambasted his accusers and reasserted his innocence.

Kuraitis alleged that he needed a petition from local players to be brought back to the casino. However, a Human Resources representative at Stones confirmed to *Card Player* that Kuraitis did not miss a paycheck until nearly the entire staff was furloughed in March, when the nation's brick-and-mortar casino market was shut down. The accusations against Kuraitis originally surfaced in early October of 2019.

When asked about the petition, Kuraitis did not provide any links or documents that could prove its existence, nor did he say how many people signed it.

"The names of the people who circulated the petition are in my letter," Kuraitis vaguely responded.

Kuraitis also declined to address any questions regarding the status of his employment with Stones and what work



he did for the casino in the interim. Despite responding to many critics, Kuraitis ignored direct questions asking him if Postle was indeed guilty, as most of the poker world suspects. He also goaded Veronica Brill, the former employee of Stones that brought the accusations to the public nearly a year ago. Brill was one of the plaintiffs who refused to sign the settlement and has continued to stay outspoken in her beliefs that Postle cheated.

It appears that Galfond wasn't the only person who was annoyed by Kuraitis' gloating. Several poker players responded to the tweet offering their help with the project. The group of volunteers will work to put every session that Postle played into a hand history format that can be easily analyzed by Galfond.

Postle himself has not been active on Twitter, but did tell the *Sacramento Bee* that he is participating in a documentary to tell his side of the story that "won't just shock the poker and gambling industries, but the entire world."

The documentary's producer, Dave Broome, drew the ire of the poker community when he said that the film "will show why he's innocent." Broome, known for his work on *The Biggest Loser*, had to assure the online mob that Stones had no financial involvement in the project. ♠



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POKER PRO “YUKON” BRAD BOOTH FOUND AFTER BEING REPORTEDLY MISSING FOR TWO MONTHS

By Steve Schult

More than two months after poker pro “Yukon” Brad Booth was reported missing, his family announced that he has been found.

According to a tweet from freelance poker journalist Jennifer Newell, Booth’s family confirmed that they had heard from him in September and that he was taking some extended alone time. Her tweet included a message from Booth’s family.

“Effective today, Sept. 16, we have confirmation that Brad is alive and well, but has been taking some time to himself as anticipated and hoped by many,” read the message from Booth’s family. “Again, we cannot thank you enough for your support and well wishes in locating him. Please note – we do not have any further information at this time.”

The Canadian poker pro went missing July 13 and was last spotted

in Reno. According to the missing person’s report filed, he was last seen leaving the Grand Sierra Resort and Casino. He told his roommate that he was going camping, but his roommate claimed he only had enough supplies to last a day or two.

The 43-year-old had been a fixture in the poker world for more than a decade and has \$793,000 in career tournament earnings, but was a regular in the game’s biggest cash games during the poker boom in the mid-late 2000s.

He was renowned for his deep-stack cash game skills and spent an 18-month period living at Bellagio in Las Vegas, playing \$200-\$400 no-limit hold’em every day. He was a part of one of the most talked-about hands in poker history when, on an episode of *High Stakes Poker*, Booth bluffed Phil Ivey off pocket kings with just four high. ♠



NEW JERSEY SETS RECORD FOR MONTHLY SPORTS BETTING HANDLE

By Steve Schult

No group of people have ever officially bet more on sports in a one-month span than New Jersey gamblers did in August, at least in licensed and regulated markets.

According to data released by the New Jersey Division of Gaming Enforcement, Garden State sportsbooks, both online and retail, accepted \$668 million worth of sports bets, a new record for monthly handle. New Jersey pummeled the previous record of \$562 million, which the state set itself in November 2019.

\$601.9 million of those bets were placed online. Year-to-date, New Jersey sportsbooks have accepted \$2.537 billion in bets, with \$2.306 billion in wagers made via the internet.

Bettors had plenty to gamble on with a full month of baseball, as well as playoff basketball and hockey games. September could be even better for the state with football underway as it is the first time in history that all four major American sports leagues are playing games at the same time.

Operators reported gross revenue of \$39.5 million on the record handle. Gross gaming revenue for the state in August was \$326.3 million, marking a 7.5 percent decrease year-over-year, but up significantly against July’s \$248.7 million.



Online casino revenue continued to keep the market afloat. Gamblers lost \$87.7 million betting online, which just barely set a new record for the third consecutive month. In July, online casinos brought in \$87.5 million in revenue, besting the initial record set in May when those companies won \$85.9 million. The robust online gaming market in New Jersey is keeping the state’s numbers up even as the major gambling tourist destinations are struggling to attract customers because of COVID-19. ♠



WSOP MAIN EVENT RUNNER-UP DARVIN MOON PASSES AWAY AT 56

By Card Player News Team



Self-employed logger and poker player Darwin Moon has passed away at the age of 56. The Oakland, Maryland resident succumbed to complications from surgery on Saturday, Sept. 19, according to a social media post from *Heartland Poker Tour* co-founder Todd Anderson.

"The best person I ever met through poker is Darwin Moon," said Anderson in the post. "A man of integrity and honor. And quite possibly the most interesting person I've ever known."

While Moon was not a professional poker player, he very nearly won the biggest and most prestigious annual tournament the game has to offer. In 2009, the self-taught, home game hero won his way into the \$10,000 buy-in *WSOP* main event via a \$130 buy-in satellite tournament at a West Virginia casino.

Moon managed to navigate his way through a field of 6,494 players to make the final table as the chip leader. He outlasted a number of big names

at the final table, including 10-time bracelet winner Phil Ivey and *Card Player's* own Jeff Shulman to make it down to heads-up play against Joe Cada. Moon ultimately finished in second place, turning his \$130 investment into just shy of \$5.2 million.

Moon recorded just six cashes in live poker tournaments outside of his huge run in the *WSOP* main event, totaling around \$23,000 in earnings. He told *Card Player* in 2010 that he didn't have much interest in becoming a fixture on the poker scene.

"I've always been poor. I can be poor after this," Moon said. He went on to explain why he would more or less return to his same lifestyle, saying, "We've lived on \$20,000 to \$25,000 a year for 26 years. I can now live the rest of my life comfortably. I'm [still] working, because my whole family was raised that way."

Moon bought a few investment properties and some pickup trucks with his poker winnings, and also purchased the farm that he grew up on. Otherwise, he went back to work running his logging company, despite perhaps no longer relying on the income it provided.

"I don't really think it's changed us as people, but it's definitely changed our lives," Moon's wife Wendy said in 2010. ♠

LAS VEGAS STRIP CASINO WILL REOPEN AS SMOKE-FREE PROPERTY

By Steve Schult

One of the few Las Vegas Strip casinos that has yet to reopen will do so with a smoke-free environment.

MGM Resorts announced that it will reopen the last of its closed Strip casinos, Park MGM, on Sept. 30. When action resumes, the property will become the first casino in Las Vegas history to prohibit smoking inside it.

According to an *Associated Press* report, President and COO of Park MGM Anton Nikodemus said that there is a large market that craves a smokeless casino.

"We believe there is a high-level of pent-up demand to have a non-smoking casino, especially here in Las Vegas," Nikodemus told the *AP*. "During this time, we've been able to

really prepare the property for a smoke-free, resort experience."

The short history of smokeless casinos hasn't been kind to operators. The infamous former Atlantic City casino Revel opened in 2012 with a smoking ban, but filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy about a year later and went out of business in 2014. The building remained empty until it was rebranded as Ocean Casino Resort in June 2018, which allowed indoor smoking.

Once Park MGM opens at the end of the month, MGM Resorts will have reopened all its properties nationwide since the COVID-19-induced shutdown of brick-and-mortar gambling in mid-March. ♠

Poker Site Operator Isai Scheinberg Gets Slap On The Wrist For Charges Stemming From Black Friday

By Steve Schult

The nearly decade-long legal fall-out stemming from poker's Black Friday came to a close in September when PokerStars founder Isai Scheinberg was sentenced to time served and a \$30,000 fine by a judge in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York.

Outside of getting off scot free from the bank fraud, money laundering, and illegal gambling counts the 73-year-old Israeli was facing, this was about as lenient of a punishment Judge Lewis A. Kaplan could dole out. Scheinberg will avoid jail time altogether, and considering the charges, the fine is nominal.

Scheinberg's legal troubles stem from 2011 when the U.S. government seized the domain names and funds of the biggest online poker providers. He was one of 11 individuals indicted in the process.

Authorities argued that any online poker room operating within its borders violated U.S. law. Scheinberg stayed out of the U.S. for nearly nine years until January 2020, when he was extradited to New York from Switzerland. When he landed in New York, he was immediately taken into custody, entered a not guilty plea, and was released on \$1 million bail.

During his first court appearance roughly two months later, Scheinberg instead pled guilty to those charges. He was facing up to five years behind bars, but even at the time, prison seemed unlikely. Federal prosecutors told *Forbes* that the U.S. had "an agreement in principle on the basic terms" with Scheinberg.

PokerStars immediately refunded its U.S. customer base in 2011. The second-largest poker site at the time on the other hand, Full Tilt Poker, was insolvent and couldn't pay back its players. In 2014, before Scheinberg sold the company to Amaya for \$4.9 billion, PokerStars



"Scheinberg's legal troubles stem from 2011 when the U.S. government seized the domain names and funds of the biggest online poker providers. The former PokerStars operator will avoid jail time altogether, and considering the charges, the fine is nominal."

provided the cash needed to pay back players who were shorted by Full Tilt's incompetence.

Scheinberg's attorney, Paul Shectman, used that gesture as an argument for a light sentence, according to the *Inner City Press*. Kaplan ended up agreeing.

"I don't condone what you did but the world is made of fallible people," said Kaplan. "It was a big mistake but should not ruin what remains of your life."

"I am pleased that Judge Kaplan has determined today not to impose a prison sentence in my case," said Scheinberg in a statement. "PokerStars played an important role in creating today's global, regulated, online poker industry by running

an honest and transparent business that always treated its players fairly. I am particularly proud that in 2011, when PokerStars exited the United States, all of its American players were made whole immediately. Indeed, PokerStars reimbursed millions of players who were owed funds from other online companies that could not or did not repay those players."

Though not currently owned by Scheinberg, PokerStars now has a foothold in some of the regulated American markets. The company is operating in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, while having a partnership in place to launch a Michigan platform when the state rolls out its online market, likely early in 2021. ♠

2020 Card Player Player of the Year Sponsored by Global Poker

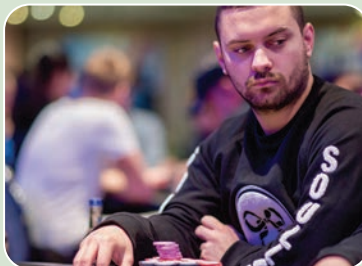


Place	Players	Points	Final Tables	Winnings
1	Vincent Wan	2,280	1	\$909,420
2	Farid Jattin	2,177	6	\$1,205,493
3	Anton Suarez	2,100	1	\$1,000,000
4	Cary Katz	2,095	8	\$2,420,543
5	Kahle Burns	1,956	6	\$2,923,988
6	Ngoc Hoang	1,900	1	\$909,420
7	Aaron Van Blarcum	1,896	8	\$1,854,522
8	Sam Greenwood	1,881	6	\$1,357,807
9	Tim Adams	1,857	6	\$5,904,777
10	Brian Altman	1,848	3	\$542,866
11	Michael Addamo	1,806	5	\$2,143,310
12	Pablo Silva	1,800	1	\$1,000,000
13	Christian Rudolph	1,750	1	\$620,000
14	James Romero	1,736	2	\$745,000
15	Erik Seidel	1,686	5	\$669,649
16	Eric Afriat	1,680	1	\$394,120
17	Alex Foxen	1,597	6	\$1,603,559
18	Nino Ullmann	1,540	2	\$370,609
19	Stephen Chidwick	1,537	6	\$1,043,973
20	Gareth Pepper	1,520	1	\$690,000

PHILLIP MIGHALL WINS WORLD POKER TOUR WORLD ONLINE CHAMPIONSHIPS MAIN EVENT

By Erik Fast

Phillip Mighall has won the 2020 *World Poker Tour World Online Championships* \$10,300 buy-in no-limit hold'em main event. The British player defeated a field of 1,011 total entries in the tournament to earn his first *WPT* title and the top prize of \$1,550,298. The event featured a \$10 million guarantee, which was narrowly surpassed when the turnout resulted in a final prize pool of \$10,110,000.



When the final table of nine was set, it was Argentina's Damian Salas who held the chip lead. The 2017 *WSOP* main event seventh-place finisher entered

the day with 74 big blinds, which was just five more than Mighall had as the second-largest stack.

2016 *EPT Dublin* main event winner Dzmitry Urbanovich's run in this event came to an end when his A♥ K♣ was out-flopped by the A♠ Q♦ of Teun Mulder. Urbanovich picked up \$277,014 for his sixth-place finish.

Salas' final hand in this event was a rollercoaster ride. He got all-in preflop in a classic race situation, with K♠ Q♠ up against the pocket treys of Mighall. The A♥ K♥ 7♠ flop gave Salas a pair of kings to surge into the lead, and the Q♣ turn furthered his

advantage in the hand. Mighall had less than a five percent chance of taking down the pot heading into the river, but the 3♣ appeared to give him a winning set of threes on the end. Salas earned \$814,663 for his third-place showing. This was the second-largest score of his career, behind the \$1.4 million he earned as the seventh-place finisher in the 2017 *WSOP* main event.

With that, Mighall took roughly a 5:3 chip lead into heads-up play against Mulder. The two exchanged the lead early on in their back-and-forth battle, but it was Mighall who sat on top when the final hand of the tournament was dealt.

Mulder raised to 3,500,000 from the button with two black aces, and Mighall three-bet to 12,800,000 from the big blind with 10♠ 7♦. Mulder just called and the flop came down A♦ J♥ 9♠. Mighall bet 12,800,000 with a gutshot straight draw, and Mulder called with his top set. The 8♥ on the turn completed Mighall's straight and he moved all-in. Mulder called and was shown the bad news. He needed a board pair on the river to keep his hopes alive, but the

2♠ was of no help.

Mulder was awarded \$1,396,968 as the runner-up finisher, a figure that was actually higher than the initial standard payouts called for thanks to a deal struck between the final two players.*

Here is a look at the final table results.

Place	Player Name	Payout
1	Phillip Mighall	\$1,550,298*
2	Teun Mulder	\$1,396,968*
3	Damian Salas	\$814,663
4	Blaz Zerjav	\$552,006
5	Victor Simionato	\$391,257
6	Dzmitry Urbanovich	\$277,014
7	Bert Stevens	\$194,112
8	Akseli Paalanen	\$153,672
9	Laszlo Molnar	\$127,386

ANDREW KELSALL WINS 2020 WORLD SERIES OF POKER GLOBAL CASINO CHAMPIONSHIP

By Erik Fast

The *World Series of Poker Circuit* brought its 2019/20 season to a conclusion with the first-ever online running of the *WSOP Global Casino Championship*. As in previous years, the event was a \$1 million guaranteed event, which players could qualify into for free by winning a *WSOP Circuit* main event, ending the season in the top 50 of the season-long leaderboard, or finishing as the player of the series at a circuit stop.

Players who won a ring during the season or finished inside the top 100 in the previous year's *WSOP* Player of the Year race standings could also play the event, but would be required to buy-in for \$10,000. Seven players exercised that option this year, joining the 123 automatic entries to create a total field of 130 vying for a prize pool of \$1,070,000.

In the end, the last player standing was Andrew Kelsall. The three-time *WSOPC* ring winner emerged victorious from this tough field with his first *WSOP* gold bracelet and the top prize of \$275,632. Kelsall won his way into the event as a season leaderboard qualifier, having finished in fourth place with 30 cashes made throughout the season.

The decision to move this season-ending event online was made in late May due to concerns about the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. At the time Executive Director of the *WSOP* Ty Stewart said, "We look forward to returning to Harrah's Cherokee in 2021, but until then, the show must go on... online."

Kelsall earned his first knockout at the final table when he picked up A♣ K♥ in the small blind after Shawn Daniels had moved all-in as the first to act. Kelsall made the call and found himself in great shape against the A♥ 5♣ of Daniels. Neither player improved and Kelsall's ace-



king high was enough to earn the pot.

WSOP bracelet winner Michael Wang shoved from the button with A♥ 8♦ and was called by small blind Michael Trivett, the 2019 *WSOP Circuit Planet Hollywood* main event winner, who held A♣ 9♣. The superior kicker played for Trivett after all five community cards were dealt, sending Wang packing with

\$87,098 for his latest deep run.

Kelsall took roughly a 5:2 lead into heads-up play against Trivett and was able to extend his lead a bit more by the time the final hand arose. The two got all-in after a flop of A♥ 7♠ 4♥. Trivett revealed 7♣ 4♣ for bottom two pair, while Kelsall showed 5♠ 3♠ for a double gutshot straight draw and a possible backdoor flush draw.

The 2♥ on the turn gave Kelsall the five-high straight to take the lead, and the 8♦ on the end locked up the pot and the title. Trivett was awarded \$170,344 as the runner-up, the second-largest score of his career.

Here is a look at the payouts awarded at the final table:

Place	Player Name	Payout
1	Andrew Kelsall	\$275,632
2	Michael Trivett	\$170,344
3	Brad Albrinck	\$120,161
4	Michael Wang	\$87,098
5	Shawn Daniels	\$64,735
6	Samuel Cosby	\$49,541
7	Eric Ethans	\$39,055
8	Frank Marasco	\$31,672

POKER STORIES PODCAST

With Mike Sexton

Poker Stories is a long-form audio podcast series that features casual interviews with some of the game's best players and personalities. Each episode highlights a well-known member of the poker world and dives deep into their favorite tales both on and off the felt.

To listen, visit www.cardplayer.com/poker-podcasts or download it directly to your device from any number of mobile apps, such as Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Google Play, or Spotify. Catch up on past episodes featuring notables such as Doyle Brunson, Antonio Esfandiari, Daniel Negreanu, Jennifer Harman, Justin Bonomo, Nick Schulman, Barry Greenstein, Michael Mizrahi, Bryn Kenney, Maria Ho, and many more.



In February of 2017, Mike Sexton sat down for one of the very first episodes of the Poker Stories podcast, sharing incredible tales from his life as a high-stakes gambler.

Highlights from the interview include collegiate gymnastics, growing up with fellow poker great Danny Robison, volunteering for war, working as a salesman, a passion for little league coaching, crazy North Carolina home games, betting more than you have, why shag dance music is the greatest, and a big sweat with Phil Ivey.

You can listen to the full episode by visiting www.cardplayer.com/link/SextonPodcast.

The Transcript Highlights

On sports betting...

"I'd win at poker five days a week, then on the weekend I'd bet sports, and by Monday I'd owe the bookmaker. No matter how much I won during the week I'd blow it on the weekends. That's how dumb I was back then. It's pathetic when I think how much I've lost in my life betting on sports. It's nothing I'm proud of, I only bring it up so other people don't fall into the same trap that I did. I used to bet way more than I had. Then I got ahold of big money, then I really started betting real big and went through that. Still it's my favorite thing to do. If you are sitting at home watching the game, how can you possibly not have a bet on it?"

On his days as a collegiate gymnast...

"In our state, gymnastics was a varsity sport. Back then, it was a big deal. My brother and I got full scholarships to college. My best event back then was the trampoline, which was still an event in the NCAA. In fact, my senior year in college was the last year that trampoline was an official event. I was so mad about it that I boycotted gymnastics for 20 years. I was a decent collegiate gymnast. I won the high score award every year at Ohio State and was the most valuable gymnast during my senior year, but at that time, OSU was at the bottom of the Big 10. Now they compete for a national title every year."

On his early days as a poker pro...

"It was an amazing game we played in Nashville, North Carolina. I drove 100 miles two days a week to play in this game on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you didn't get there by noon, you couldn't get a seat in the game. It was full of tobacco farmers... it was really a lot of fun. I really won all the time. Honestly."

On who should join him on poker's Mount Rushmore...

"In my book, you put Chip Reese up there first. Maybe Doyle. Stu Ungar. Puggy Pearson. (That's too many names already) I know, but to me, those guys are true hall of famers. Those are the legends in poker. Those guys back in the 1970s that started the WSOP, that played the highest stakes games in the world. These guys are icons in my eyes. Johnny Moss. Jack Straus. These guys will always be up there in my mind, and I'll never rank ahead of them." *(Editor's Note: We respectfully disagree, Mike.) ♠*



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HAND HISTORY REWIND

Looking Back: Mike Sexton Wins The 2016 World Poker Tour Montreal Main Event

By Card Player News Team



Mike Sexton spent 15 years as the voice of the *World Poker Tour*, alongside co-commentator Vince Van Patten, before recording his first victory on the other side of the broadcast. At the age of 69, Sexton emerged victorious in the 2016 *WPT Montreal* \$3,850 CAD no-limit hold'em main event to secure his first title on the tour that he helped popularize. For the win, Sexton earned \$317,896 and saw his name added to the *WPT Champions Cup*, which has since been renamed in his honor.

This victory came in Sexton's third appearance at a *WPT* final table. After years of being prohibited from playing in the events by his contract, Sexton was finally given the go-ahead to participate starting in 2010. That year, he made his first final table, finishing sixth in the *WPT Bay 101 Shooting Star* main event for \$148,000. In the spring of 2013, he came within a couple of spots of a win, but ultimately finished third at the *WPT Venice Grand Prix* for \$69,723. Sexton also made a fourth final table after winning his title, placing fourth in the 2017 *WPT L.A. Poker Classic* for another \$300,690 to bring his career earnings on the tour to \$1,011,725.

The *WPT Montreal* main event drew 648 entries, resulting in a \$1,490,802 USD prize pool that was doled out among the top 84 finishers. Sexton held the chip lead when the six-handed final table was set, with Canadian local and soon-to-be *WPT* champion Ema Zajmovic in second chip position, and *WSOP* bracelet winner Benny Chen looming behind.

Here are five key hands from Sexton's run to the title.

Tournament: 2016 WPT Montreal Main Event

Buy-In: \$3,850 CAD • No. of Entries: 648 • Prize Pool: \$1,490,802 USD

First Place Prize: \$317,896 USD

HAND
NO. 1

Sexton Takes Out Gagnon On TV
Final Table Bubble

10♠	10♦	J♠	J♥
Samuel Gagnon 1,400,000	Mike Sexton 4,550,000		
K♠	9♣	2♦	8♥
Q♣			

Blinds - 40,000-80,000 with a 10,000 ante

The Action

Benny Chen raised to 160,000 from the hijack and Samuel Gagnon moved all in for his last 1,390,000 from the button. Sexton woke up with pocket jacks in the small blind and made the call, forcing a fold from Chen. Gagnon was in trouble with pocket tens, and got no help from the flop, turn, or river, earning \$50,590 for his deep run in the event. Sexton scooped the pot, giving him the chip lead entering the live-streamed final table.

HAND
NO. 2

Ema Zajmovic Runs Into Aces,
Finishes Fifth

K♦	Q♥	A♥	A♦
Ema Zajmovic 2,085,000	Mike Sexton 6,955,000		
5♠	4♣	2♦	5♦
9♠			

Blinds - 60,000-120,000 with a 20,000 ante

The Action

Sexton picked up the best starting hand in poker and raised from the cutoff. Ema Zajmovic was just 16 hands removed from losing a huge chunk of her stack with A-K against pocket aces. Having come into the day in second place, she now sat as the shortest stack with five remaining. She picked up K-Q on the button and moved all-in. Sexton made the quick call with his pocket aces and held up on a low, paired board. Zajmovic hit the rail in fifth place, earn-

ing \$76,127 for her deep run. She went on to become the first female player to win an open-field *WPT* main event the following year, but this particular title belonged to Sexton.

**HAND
NO. 3**

Sexton Correctly Folds Top Pair To Chen's Rivered Gutshot



The Action

2013 *WSOP Millionaire Maker* event winner Benny Chen raised from the button and Sexton defended his big blind. Sexton flopped top pair and checked to Chen, who made a small bet of 150,000 with his gutshot straight draw. A blank on the turn saw Sexton continue with his pot-control approach, check-calling another bet of 400,000 from Chen. The J♠ on the river completed Chen's straight. Sexton checked a third time and Chen bet 1,200,000 into the pot of 1,740,000. Sexton had played his hand to catch bluffs, but he correctly decided to get out of the way this time. He folded his top pair to maintain his chip lead, while Chen took down the sizable pot.

**HAND
NO. 4**

Nadir Lalji Loses A Flip To Finish Third



The Action

Sexton picked up pocket eights in the small blind and raised to 375,000. Short-stack Nadir Lalji three-bet all-in for 2,200,000, or just shy of 15 big blinds. Sexton made the call with his medium pair and the two were off to the races. Sexton jumped out to a massive lead by flopping a set

of eights, and a blank on the turn left Lalji drawing dead. The Canadian businessman earned \$136,806 as the third-place finisher, while Sexton took down the pot to close the gap considerably on chip leader Benny Chen. After this knockout, Sexton entered heads-up with 59 big blinds to Chen's 71 big blinds.

**HAND
NO. 5**

Sexton Secures WPT Montreal Title After An Epic Heads-Up Duel



The Action

It took just 106 hands to narrow the final table from six players down to the final two. Heads-up play between Sexton and Chen, however, would last for another 158 hands. Chen was able to extend his lead early, building a 10:1 chip advantage through the first hour of their lengthy showdown. Sexton was able to hang around, securing multiple crucial double-ups to keep his title hopes alive. On the 156th hand of their battle, Sexton rivered the bottom end of a straight against Chen's pair and a higher straight draw, which gave him the lead for the first time during heads-up play. Two hands later, it was all over. Chen moved all-in from the button and Sexton called from the big blind with pocket queens. Sexton flopped top set, but Chen had outs to a gutshot straight. Sexton's set held up to secure him the title and the top prize of \$317,896. Chen settled for \$213,515 as the runner-up finisher.

Final Table Results

1.	Mike Sexton	\$317,896
2.	Benny Chen	\$213,515
3.	Nadir Lalji	\$136,806
4.	Ilan Boujenah	\$99,067
5.	Ema Zajmovic	\$76,127
6.	Jake Schwartz	\$61,000
7.	Samuel Gagnon	\$50,590
8.	Antonin Duda	\$40,343
9.	Terry Schumacher	\$30,254

The Poker World Says Goodbye To The Legendary Mike Sexton

Remembering Poker's Greatest Ambassador And His Contributions To The Game

By Julio Rodriguez



The year was 1992, and there were signs that perhaps poker's reputation was changing. *Card Player Magazine*, then in its fifth year of operation, decided to make note, devoting an entire issue to the subject of player sponsorships.

It was an incredibly novel concept. After all, what reputable business would want some seedy poker player to represent them? Who could possibly break the mold of the stereotypical rounder, haggard and grizzled from too many sleepless, smoke-filled nights at the table?

Enter Mike Sexton.

Sexton had spent time jumping out of airplanes for the 82nd Airborne Division as a paratrooper, and had a diverse career before poker that included sales, little league coaching, and even teaching ballroom dancing. But despite his 44 years, the former Ohio

State University gymnast still maintained the fresh-faced smile that would light up any cardroom he entered.

The company that chose Mike to be their spokesperson was La Mode clothing, who felt that the affable Sexton was perfect for their line of sportswear. For the first time ever, a poker player was deemed valuable enough to influence the public. Whenever Mike played cards, he would do so in his La Mode visor, polo, and jacket, and he got paid to do so.

It makes sense that Sexton was the game's first sponsored player, as he was always the one who unwaveringly believed that poker was destined for a bigger audience. The eternal optimist was convinced that one day a poker tournament could rival events such as Wimbledon, the Super Bowl, and the Stanley Cup.

The '92 feature story was authored

by two-time *WSOP* bracelet winner Susie Isaacs, who was quick to be convinced of Sexton's optimism, saying that he was "a great ambassador" who "would like to be a spokesperson to promote" the game.

"Today, Mike Sexton plays poker for money and dances for fun," Isaacs wrote. "Tomorrow, he could be making the rounds of the national TV talk-show circuit, promoting the future of poker."

There were still years to go before online poker launched, and televised poker was as archaic as it was sporadic, but it was clear that Sexton saw the writing on the wall, even back then.

"Poker players are too shallow-minded about the potential of poker," he said. "In order for poker to grow and meet its true big money potential, we need corporate sponsorship and support. Athletes in other sports get millions of dollars a year





because of sponsorships. These same sponsors hesitate when it comes to poker because poker is related to the gambling industry and they fear that such publicity could hurt their image. But I believe that by the year 2000, all major tournament players will have sponsorships.”

Sexton ended up only being slightly off in his prediction, but he was right on about the timing of the upcoming poker boom, and he worked non-stop behind the scenes to position himself for its takeoff.

A few years after his first feature in *Card Player*, Sexton found himself in a long downswing, and bricked out on a \$530 satellite into the \$5,000 *Four Queens Classic*. He was nearly resigned to spending the event on the rail, when he ran into Scotty Nguyen.

“I have a feeling you’ll be lucky today,” said Nguyen, as he roped in a handful of others to put up Mike’s buy-in, giving him a 25 percent freeroll.

Sexton went on to win the event, putting a decent amount of cash in his pocket and ending his downswing. Linda Johnson, the First Lady of Poker and then-publisher of *Card Player Magazine*, asked Sexton to pen a column about his experience. The article turned out to be a hit, with Sexton entertainingly recapping how he scrounged up the buy-in, and his final-table experience with the likes of Jim Bechtel, Erik Seidel, and the young, brash Phil Hellmuth.

“Phil, we don’t mind you consistently winning our money, but please do it quietly,” Sexton quipped about his opponent.

Johnson asked Sexton to contin-

ue writing for *Card Player*, and he accepted. Between 1996 and 2006, Sexton wrote more than 200 columns, sharing stories from his high-stakes battles on the felt, (and the golf course), and profiling some of the best players in the world while they were still up and comers.

The *Inside Professional Poker* column was also frequently home to many of Mike’s predictions. Reading them today makes it clear that he had his finger on the pulse of the industry’s struggles and potential opportunities.

“To attract corporate America, we must sell tournament poker as a competition, perhaps even a sport. We need to put on television programs that are exciting and that will attract viewers. As I see it, poker will only be successful on television when the viewer can follow the play of the hand (hands must be superimposed on the screen) and can see what, when, and how a player plays a hand, with expert commentary provided for analysis.” [Feb. 6, 1998]

It would be nearly five more years before the *World Poker Tour* debuted on the *Travel Channel*, with hole card cameras, and of course, Mike in the booth to provide expert commentary alongside Vince Van Patten.

Of course, not all of his ideas were winners.

“Allow players to buy a daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly ‘time’ pass, like a seasonal pass to a ski resort. Players would be issued a badge to place in front of them that would indicate to the dealers that time payment should not be taken from them (as they have already paid it). In a raked game, every time a player wins a pot, he would get

the ‘drop’ back.” [Dec. 11, 1998]

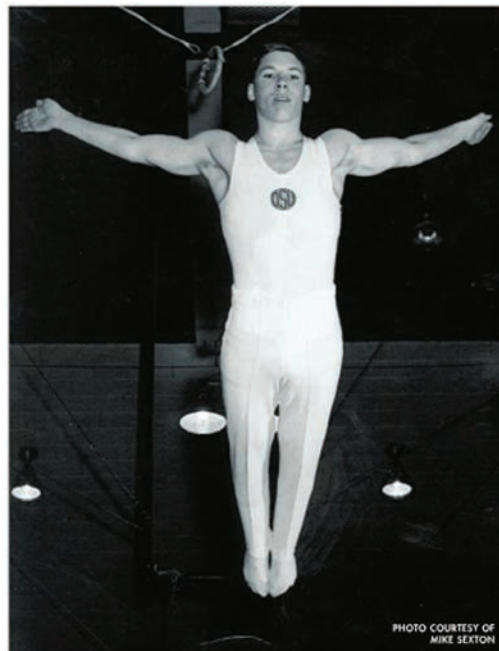
His dedication to growing the game led to creating the *Tournament of Champions*. Sexton wanted to model an event after the PGA Tour in which only tournament winners from the previous calendar year could participate. Despite drawing a field that was double the size of the *WSOP* main event, the tournament struggled to turn a profit. However, it was there that Mike was able to unconsciously show off for *WPT* co-founder Steve Lipscomb.

“Mike is an extraordinary poker anchor with the ability to talk circles around anyone in the poker arena,” Lipscomb told *Card Player* back in 2004. “Although Mike is a hard worker with pen and pad in hand, he also has this raw natural ability to talk about poker far better than anyone else. Where other announcers’ language is riddled with poker-speak, Mike can talk about poker in an exciting, yet simplistic way that everyone can understand.”

More important than talking poker, he could sell it. When Lipscomb needed funding to help launch the tour, he turned to Mike and asked if he knew anybody who would be interested.

“I had two people in mind for him,” Sexton recalled, telling the story on *Card Player’s* *Poker Stories* podcast. “One was Lyle Berman, who is a Poker Hall of Famer and who was also once the Casino Man of the Year. And the other one was going to be Jerry Buss, the owner of the Los Angeles Lakers. Well, we never got to Buss. Linda [Johnson] and I went with Steve to Lyle, and the rest is history.”

Sexton was the voice of the *WPT*



© Mike Sexton

for 15 years. For many watching at home, he was their first introduction to hold'em, explaining the rules of "the Cadillac of poker," a game that took just "a minute to learn, and a lifetime to master." He would end every episode with the sign off, "May all your cards be live, and may all your pots be monsters."

Despite his senior status Sexton was far from a poker traditionalist, and was always very bullish about the future of online poker. He got involved with partypoker.com in the early stages (he picked the name), and was even sent

to India and the Dominican Republic to lend his poker expertise to the programmers who were green to the game.

It was Sexton's belief that the site could grow their player pool by tying online qualifiers to a live event, which led to the *PartyPoker Million*, a marquee tournament aboard a cruise ship with a then very-risky seven-figure guarantee. With unforeseen expenses and a smaller-than-anticipated turnout, the first running of the event lost \$600,000.

"From a financial standpoint, the tournament was a failure," wrote Mike

O'Malley, Sexton's colleague at the site. "The site was treading water, not making money. The gig was up, the *PartyPoker Million* was over, as far as [site co-founder] Vikrant [Bhargava] was concerned. Mike would have none of it. The three of us sat in Vikrant's office while Mike yelled at us about how successful it [actually] was, and how people were talking about the site and how the next tournament was going to be huge."

"There was no reason to believe him," O'Malley continued. "I specifically remember telling him how



Born: Sept. 22, 1947

Hometown: Dayton, Ohio

Turned Pro: 1977

Live Tournament Earnings: \$6 Million

Top Live Tournament Scores

July 2012	WSOP \$1M Big One For One Drop	9th Place	\$1,109,333
June 2006	Tournament Of Champions	1st Place	\$1,000,000
Nov. 2016	WPT Montreal Main Event	1st Place	\$317,896
March 2017	WPT LA Poker Classic Main Event	4th Place	\$300,690
June 2008	WSOP \$10,000 Pot-Limit Hold'em	4th Place	\$248,160
March 2011	WPT Bay 101 Shooting Star Main Event	6th Place	\$148,000
June 2011	WSOP \$1,500 Stud Eight-Or-Better	2nd Place	\$123,925
June 2015	WSOP \$1,500 NLHE	9th Place	\$115,980
Sept. 1996	Four Queens Classic Main Event	1st Place	\$112,000
May 1989	WSOP \$1,500 Stud Eight-Or-Better	1st Place	\$104,400

Steve Lipscomb, Linda Johnson,
and Mike Sexton



delusional he was, and how he always thought the sky was blue. For some reason, to this day I don't know how or why, Mike was able to talk Vikrant into giving it one last shot. That was it, one last try. Three years later the company went public on the London Stock Exchange and shortly thereafter had a market cap of \$12 billion."

His career off the felt was booming, but Sexton always made sure to stay

sharp as a player. He won his *WSOP* bracelet back in 1989, in the \$1,500 seven card stud eight-or-better event, but he had numerous scores over the years on the tournament circuit, despite the fact that he was contractually forbidden from playing in *WPT* events.

In 2000, he won the *Euro Finals of Poker* in Paris. He had no problem sitting down with the high rollers for the *WSOP's* \$1 million buy-in *Big One For One Drop* in 2012, and finished in the money. He had 24 final tables at the *WSOP* overall.

After his restrictions on playing *WPT* events were lifted, he also proved more than capable, making four final tables and even winning a title at the *WPT Montreal* main event in 2017 for \$317,817. The victory meant that his name was added to the *WPT* Champions Cup, which has since been renamed in Sexton's honor.

Sexton was thrilled to see his creation, the *Tournament of Champions*, return in 2004, and he was overjoyed in 2006 when he won it, beating Daniel Negreanu heads-up to take home the \$1 million first-place prize. He later donated half of his winnings to charity.

Alongside Johnson, Jan Fisher, and Lisa Tenner, Sexton co-founded PokerGives, an organization dedicated to bolstering the poker community's

image by providing services for the less fortunate in Las Vegas.

"For poker to go to the next level, we must embrace charities," Sexton said in 2004. "The future of poker must include becoming big in its donations to charity. The most ardent adversaries of poker could not be against poker if we were to start donating huge bucks to worthwhile charities. And why not? It's the right thing to do."

Sexton will forever be regarded as poker's greatest ambassador not only because of his iconic voice, forward-thinking innovations, and steadfast optimism about the game's potential, but also because of the way he carried himself at the table each and every day. It was that tireless example of class that saw poker go from a game hidden away in the back of a casino to a legitimate sport watched by millions of fellow players from across the globe.

"I'm amazed that players criticize and ridicule weak players in a game. Only two things can happen when they do this. They convince the bad player that he is inferior, and he quits the game, or they smarten him up so that he plays better," Sexton preached 25 years ago. "The time has come to put more class into poker."

Mission accomplished, Mike. Rest in peace. ♠

THE "GUTTING LOSS" OF A "GIANT FOR THE GAME"

By Card Player News Team

Mike Sexton passed away on Sept. 6, following a prolonged battle with prostate cancer. He was two weeks shy of his 73rd birthday.

The announcement came from fellow Poker Hall of Fame member Linda Johnson, who had been among those by Sexton's side as he entered hospice care.

When news of Sexton's condition broke online, it spread quickly and sparked an outpouring of messages and stories on various social media platforms. Just days before he passed, Sexton was even able to watch a special webcast featuring many of his friends and colleagues who got the opportunity to say goodbye.

"A gutting loss. Mike Sexton was a giant for the game," wrote 10-time *WSOP* bracelet winner and *WPT LA Poker Classic* champion Phil Ivey. "Very few people did more for the game of poker than he did."

Daniel Negreanu, who has two *WPT* titles of his own and finished runner-up to Sexton in the 2006 *Tournament of Champions*, echoed Ivey's sentiment. "A competitor, a friend, a remarkable human being," Negreanu said.

WPT Executive Director Matt Savage admitted that he



hadn't been coping well with his grief over Sexton's death, saying, "There comes a time in everyone's life when people we love pass away, but this really hurts. I loved him like a brother."



High-stakes tournament standout Justin Bonomo, who is second on the all-time money list with more than \$49 million in earnings, published a nine-tweet thread detailing how Sexton played a pivotal role in his poker journey.

Bonomo stumbled upon an episode of the *WPT* while staying with his uncle in Los Angeles. He had been traveling the world playing *Magic: The Gathering* tournaments, but after watching a few episodes and hearing Sexton break down the game, Bonomo dove into poker and never looked back.

"The innovative hole card camera let you get in on the action, and Mike Sexton's legendary voice turned it into an exciting, gripping story," Bonomo wrote. "I was hooked. Thank you, Mike Sexton, for the crucial role you played. Thank you for all the captivating stories you shared at the tables. Thank you for always saying, 'hi' and treating me with respect. It meant a lot to me."

Jason Koon, who is also in the top 10 of the all-time money list with \$32.1 million in earnings, gave Sexton credit for his role in the poker boom.

"Without your influence and inspiration, many of us would have never made the plunge to playing poker for a living," wrote Koon. "We'll see you on the other side, brother."

Fellow high roller Mike McDonald, who has \$13.5 million in earnings himself, agreed that if it weren't for Sexton, he also might not have ever tried to play poker profession-

ally.

"Those early seasons of the *WPT* all over Canadian TV during the hockey lockout were what made me want to pursue poker," McDonald said.

WPT President and CEO Adam Pliska offered similar thoughts in a seven-minute tribute video published by his company.

"To his friends, Mike was known as a humble man, and a kind and generous soul," said Pliska. "Never without a smile on his face and always game for a new adventure, Mike was never too busy to share a laugh, stop and take a picture with a fan, or, a fact to which many of his friends can attest, take your money on the golf course."

Tony Dunst, who took over in the commentary booth for Sexton when he left the *WPT* to rejoin partypoker as chairman, knew that the poker world had lost one of its greatest storytellers.

"He wasn't just a champion for winning poker tournaments, but also because he always championed for the players," said Dunst. "Most of all, I'll miss his incredible stories. I hate knowing how much of poker history left with him."

Although 15-time *WSOP* bracelet winner Phil Hellmuth has been a recipient of plenty of Sexton's ribbing and roasts, he pointed out that Mike's friendly demeanor had real longevity.

"In 33 years of competing in high-stress, high-pressure tournaments, I never saw Mike Sexton go off the rails," Hellmuth wrote in a blog post. "No poker brat moments. Always classy, always pleasant, and always nice to everyone. Mike always handled himself well at the poker table."

"It's hard to overstate the impact Mike has had on our world," said *WPT Foxwoods Poker Classic* champion and eight-time *WSOP* bracelet winner Erik Seidel. "His enthusiasm and love for poker has been so infectious and pure, he changed the game forever."

The appreciation and the memories continued to pour in online. For seemingly the first time in the history of the internet, you couldn't find a negative sentiment. The man was universally loved by everyone who had the pleasure of being in his orbit.

His *WPT* co-host of 15 years, Vince Van Patten, summed it up perfectly.

"My buddy. My partner. What an exceptional human being you were," said Van Patten. "The world won't be the same without you." ♠



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POKER'S GREATEST FRIEND

By Linda Johnson

I first met Mike in the '80s. Back then, the poker world was quite small. We were both playing poker for a living so our paths crossed often. Those of you who only watched him do commentary on TV might not realize how great of a player he was. Mike had more than \$6.5 million in winnings, and that figure didn't include the high-stakes cash games which he beat on a regular basis. He has a *WSOP* bracelet and a *WPT* championship to his name.

In the mid-90s, I asked Mike to become a columnist for *Card Player* (I was the publisher at the time). Mike was so kind, that he never forgot that I gave him his start and his exposure to the poker world and he spent the next 25 years thanking me for doing so. I always told him that I may have opened the door for him, but he ran through it and made a life in the poker industry all for himself. His column was loved by poker enthusiasts worldwide.

Almost everyone in poker would agree that Mike was the game's greatest ambassador. His vision for poker was unlimited, eternally hopeful and optimistic. In fact, Mike was the first poker player to get a sponsorship (La Mode clothing company).

He planned and hosted what was the grandest spectacle in poker at that time, the original *Tournament of Champions* held in Las Vegas in 1999. I remember people telling Mike it couldn't be done, but they didn't know how determined Mike could be when he set his mind to something.

Mike set the rules for the original *TOC* to make it quite prestigious. To be eligible to participate, players had to qualify by winning a tournament that had a \$200+ buy-in sometime in the past year. He wanted all the big names there so he also made all *WSOP* bracelet winners eligible. The *TOC* set a record for participation as almost 700 players put up the \$2,000 entry fee, one of the biggest buy-ins ever at that time.

It was a first-class event. I still remember how handsome Mike was in his tuxedo. Players marched in carrying their country flags to the tune of

We Are The Champions by Queen. I still remember the goosebumps and pride I had that day to be part of the poker world. Mike even had a lounge for poker players to enjoy and had bands play for our dancing pleasure. (Mike was an amazing dancer, by the way. He and his brother Tom could even make me look like I knew what I was doing.)

Mike and I worked together announcing the *TOC* final table, which led to us working together on other poker projects. He and I were the original spokespeople for partypoker. Back in the early days of internet poker, there were a lot of software issues, so it fell on the two of us to keep assuring the public that the problems would be worked out. Without Mike's endorsement and drive, online poker, and specifically partypoker, would not have grown like it did.

Another one of Mike's visions was the *Party Poker Million*, where a player could win a package online that included a one-week cruise and a \$10,000 entry. For as little as \$1 in an online satellite, a player could rub elbows with some of the best in the world. Back then, Mike would even personally call up each of the satellite winners to welcome them to the cruise. *Card Player Cruises* ended up hosting four *PPM* tournaments on full-ship charters.

Around the turn of the century, Steve Lipscomb called a meeting with Mike and myself while we were in a rainforest in Costa Rica. This was where the idea of the *World Poker Tour* was born, and the rest is history. We all know what a great commentator he was and what great charisma he had with his co-announcer Vince Van Patten. I personally think Mike and Vince's work with the *WPT* was a catalyst to the poker boom.

He was also an extremely generous man. He was always first to give a handout to a needy poker player down on his luck. In 2006 when he won \$1 million in the *TOC*, he donated \$100,000 each to five different charities. In 2009, he helped me



co-found pokergives.org along with Jan Fisher and Lisa Tenner.

Mike was an awesome family man. He shared his success with his four brothers and two sisters. Mike was 60 when he and his wife Karen welcomed their son Ty to the world. I remember walking into the hospital room the day Ty was born. Mike held Ty and never looked away from him for the two hours we were there. Mike vowed that he would be a hands-on father, and he kept that promise. Despite his incredibly busy schedule, he tried to never miss one of Ty's sporting events or extracurricular activities.

I had the pleasure of traveling the world with Mike Sexton and the *WPT* crew during its first six seasons as the studio announcer. We also went on many cruises together and taught *WPT* Boot Camp and gave seminars together for years. Throughout it all, Mike was never too busy to stop for a photo with a fan or to give an autograph.

I was honored to be one of Mike's constant visitors throughout his battle with cancer. He had accepted his fate and was realistic about the fact that he probably wouldn't survive. But we had lots of great conversations throughout his last few months.

At Mike's request about 10 days before he passed away, I announced to the poker world that he was ill. I

received literally thousands of emails, texts, and social media messages, which I was able to share with him. Mike Matusow's four-hour tribute to Mike took place three nights before he passed away, and so many of his friends got to speak to him one last time and let him know how much he did for the poker world and how loved he was. We watched the podcast along with Jan Fisher, Karen, Ty, Loni (his sister), and Shawna (his cousin). Mike stayed awake the entire time and had a huge smile on his face as we all got to hear the stories about him.

Mike was a role model for the entire poker world. I loved him and will miss him greatly, but I'm glad he is no longer suffering. Rest in peace, my dear friend. ♠



Linda Johnson is a WSOP bracelet winner and member of the Poker Hall of Fame, the Women in Poker Hall of Fame, and WPT Honors. She

is available to host tournaments, seminars, and charity events. Please contact her at cardplayercruise@aol.com with questions or comments.

PLAYING HIGH-STAKES HOLLYWOOD HOLD'EM WITH MIKE SEXTON

By Houston Curtis

The poker world took a very bad beat with the loss of a legend. To millions of fans, Mike Sexton was literally the face of poker. He's the guy who, alongside Vince Van Patten, would famously stand next to the winner on every episode of the *World Poker Tour* saying, "May all your cards be live and may all your pots be monsters!"

But to me, Mike Sexton was a friend whom I had shared many nights with playing high-stakes hold'em, along with many celebrities, athletes, and billionaires.

It was a hot day today in Arizona. The kind of day that makes you just want to stay inside, get a big glass of iced tea and enjoy the air conditioning. I had just put the ice in my third glass when I got a text from a close friend.

"Mike Sexton passed away. He always had a smile. Never said anything bad about anyone. Really good guy. He always thought poker would be big."

The text from my friend (a former WSOP champion) had such a pure sadness about it. He knew Mike was sick, but he had truly hoped he would pull a one outer... and so did I. I sunk into a chair on the porch, the ice in my empty glass already melting from the dry heat still looming, despite it being pitch dark outside. I kept reading my friend's text over and over, perhaps hoping I was reading it wrong. His words about Mike, however, truly resonated with me.

"He always thought poker would be big."

Mike loved poker in a much broader way than most. A lot of peo-

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2020 WPT World Online Championship
\$10,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Victor Simionato
55,100,000 Chips

Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 28.0%
After Flop: 8.0%
After Turn: 5.0%



Damian Salas
37,600,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 64.0%
After Flop: 91.0%
After Turn: 95.0%

PREFLOP

With seven players remaining and blinds of 250,000-500,000 with a 62,500 ante, Victor Simionato raised to 1,300,000 from the hijack. Damian Salas called from the big blind.

FLOP



Salas checked, Simionato bet 1,600,000, and Salas called.

TURN



Salas checked, and Simionato checked.

RIVER



Salas checked. Simionato bet 3,800,000, and Salas called.

ANALYSIS

Damian Salas is no stranger to playing at big final tables with huge money on the line, as he finished seventh in the 2017 *World Series of Poker* main event for more than \$1.4 million. In this hand he utilized a pot-control approach to playing his flopped top pair, and ended up winning a healthy pot from aggressive chip leader Victor Simionato. The hand began with Simionato raising K-5 suited in late position at the seven-handed table. Salas, who sat with the second-largest stack at the table, defended his big blind with K-J offsuit and flopped top pair. He checked as the first to act, likely looking to control the size of the pot while playing from out of position while simultaneously enticing the in-position player to continuation bet and perhaps bluff again on later streets. Simionato flopped bottom pair and decided to bet a bit more than one-third of the size of the pot. Salas continued with his gambit and called. The turn brought another middle card and Salas checked a second time. Simionato opted to check behind this time and the 6♠ on the river put three spades and four cards to a straight on the board. Salas checked a third time and Simionato seized upon the scare card as an opportunity to try to take down the pot without showdown. He bet 3.8 million into the pot of 6.7 million and received a call from Salas, whose top pair with a strong kicker was under-represented. Salas took down the sizable pot to move within a handful of big blinds of the chip lead.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-HOLDEM

ple love to play, but Mike Sexton loved to talk about poker. He loved to talk about the great characters who played the game, both from today and throughout the past. He was a poker historian as well as a poker futurist who saw that poker was only going to get bigger if it had the chance to grow and was handled properly by the media. This is why the title “Ambassador of Poker” was so fitting.

The first time I met Mike Sexton he arrived at the Beverly Hills Hotel with billionaire Alec Gores to play in my weekly game. He had been playing in a high-stakes, pot-limit game that Tobey Maguire and I were also scoping out.

Tobey had played with him the previous week, but I had to be on set during that time and missed the game. What neither of us knew then, was that Mike had introduced Gores to L.A. poker after meeting Alec through *Card Player* magazine.

As usual, Molly Bloom was getting the room ready and had already begun serving drinks to a few of the early arrivals. Tobey and I showed up together that week and Mike arrived with Alec. We had a strict rule in the game that no pros were allowed, and despite Mike’s celebrity status, he clearly fit into the pro category. However, because he was arriving alongside a billionaire who had just developed a taste for poker, we certainly weren’t going to rock the boat. (At this time, Tobey and I had no idea we had Mike to thank for bringing Alec into the game.)

I remember that we all took to Mike immediately. He had a way of making you forget that he was in the Poker Hall of Fame, and a pioneer of the modern, televised poker era. Mike was always the biggest poker fan in the room. He had great stories about Stu Ungar, Doyle Brunson, Amarillo Slim, and everyone from the old days. To be honest, some of the ‘donators’ in our game didn’t even have any idea who Ungar even was, but they still loved hearing Mike spin tales of poker’s rich history, comparing players from the old days to today’s top professionals.

Mike quickly joined the winners circle in the game and was always very careful to play down his scores. He booked his wins quietly, never drawing attention to the fact that he had just had a six-figure night. And on the rare occasions that he lost, he made it seem like he had been losing every week. It’s an old school trait that you don’t see enough of in today’s ego-driven poker culture.

But win or lose, one thing remained constant. Mike always left with a smile on his face, and would walk around the table, taking time to shake everyone’s hand. He was a class act who you simply enjoyed spending time with, and you could tell he enjoyed it as well.

It didn’t take long for Mike to realize that the game was really being run by Tobey and myself. He also realized how much money was being taken out of the game with the massive tips that were going to Molly on a nightly basis. And since Mike had given his word to Alec to help him with his game, it would make sense that he would be the one suggesting that Alec hold the game at his house in order to give himself a home-court advantage.

In essence, you could give Mike Sexton some credit for



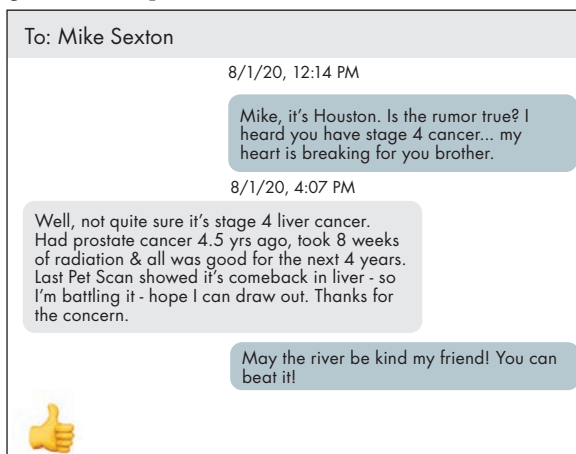
what led to Molly being sent to New York and having her L.A. game taken away from her. I didn’t write about it in my book, and Molly had no clue about it to begin with, but Mike and I spoke about it on a few occasions as early as just a couple months ago before I found out he had stage 4 cancer.

A while back I received a phone call from Mike congratulating me on the release of my book. He had ordered a copy from Amazon and told me he couldn’t wait to read it. I asked him if he would give me an honest

review once finished and he promised he would.

A week later Mike called me again. The book still hadn’t arrived, and he had ordered yet another copy! I felt bad, but COVID-19 had screwed up everything and my publisher hadn’t even sent me copies of my own book yet. What I didn’t realize then is that Mike was up against a clock. He didn’t know how much time he had, but still wanted to spend some of it reading the book. I ended up sending him a digital copy, and he read it right away. Incredible!

When I found out he was sick, I reached out to him. This would be my last conversation with one of the finest gentlemen in poker.



I think Mike and I both knew the odds of beating widespread cancer that had reached his liver were slim-to-none, but when he said he was hoping he could draw out, I tried to offer some encouragement.

My heart goes out to Mike’s family, especially his beloved son Ty. Mike would bring pictures of his son to the games and was always doting on him.

Mike, I’m grateful for the support you’ve shown to me even during your most difficult time, and I’m proud to have played at the same table with you in the game that you said was the best you’d ever played in. But most of all, I’m honored to have called you a friend. God Speed Mr. Ambassador! ♠



Be sure to visit www.KardSharp.com/cardplayer for my video tribute to Mike, where I will read some insights he shared with me, including his story about how *Card Player* introduced him to Alec Gores, who ultimately got him into our no-pro, Hollywood home game.

THE SECRET TO MIKE SEXTON'S WINNING SMILE

By Gavin Griffin

When I decided to spend my last two columns arguing a different side to an opinion that Mike Sexton held, I had no idea he was sick. I don't want the last thing I have on record to be an argument (though a playful and inconsequential one) with such a wonderful character of our game. Instead, I'd like to share a few good memories I have of the man.

I remember going on the *Party Poker Million* cruise in 2005. Believe it or not, every cabin on the ship would run a documentary video about Mike. It told the story of his time as a gymnast at Ohio State University and in the Army as a paratrooper. Any time, day or night, you could see Mike on the rings or giving a tour of his beautiful home. It was my first glimpse into what his actual life was like, only previously seeing him on some *World Series of Poker* and *World Poker Tour* broadcasts.

The first time I ever had any interaction with him was at a *Professional Poker Tour* stop. The *PPT* was the



Mike Chuckles To Himself For Gavin's Winner Photo

short-lived series produced by the *WPT* that you were required to qualify for. I was one of the youngest people in the field, and most of those who qualified had been around the game for a long time. I was a little out of place, despite what I had already accomplished in poker.

I was shuffling around the room while we were getting ready for the tournament to start, and I stumbled into a conversation. Huck Seed was negotiating terms with

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2020 WPT World Online Championship
\$10,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 30.0%
After Flop: 0%
After Turn: 0%

Blaz Zerjav
35,900,000 Chips



Victor Simionato
46,100,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 67.0%
After Flop: 100.0%
After Turn: 100.0%

PREFLOP

With six players remaining and blinds of 300,000-600,000 with a 75,000 ante, Blaz Zerjav limped in from the small blind. Victor Simionato checked from the big blind.

FLOP



Zerjav bet 600,000, and Simionato called.

TURN



Zerjav bet 1,900,000. Simionato raised to 6,400,000, and Zerjav called.

RIVER



Zerjav checked. Simionato bet 11,000,000, and Zerjav folded.

ANALYSIS

In this battle of the blinds, Victor Simionato flopped a full house in position against the two-pair of small blind Blaz Zerjav. The hand began with Zerjav limping in with 8-5 suited after it folded around to him. Simionato checked his option with K-5 offsuit and promptly flopped kings full of fives. Zerjav had made a vulnerable two pair with the kings on the board along with a pair of fives and his eight kicker. He bet from out of position, likely hoping to deny equity to weak hands with overcards to his fives. Simionato just called with his huge hand and the 8♣ on the turn improved Zerjav to kings and eights, while also putting a second club on the board, making two separate flush draws possible. Zerjav bet again, firing 1.9 million into a pot of 2.9 million. With his opponent having bet into him twice now, Simionato decided to raise to 6,400,000 with his boat. Zerjav found himself in a tough spot. He had a hand that felt strong enough for him to bet the turn for equity denial and perhaps to extract value from another five. But when his opponent raises the turn after twice being bet into, Zerjav's hand could easily be in very rough shape against Simionato's range. Zerjav decided to make the call and the 6♣ on the river completed the possible backdoor flush. Zerjav checked and Simionato made a healthy bet of 11 million into the pot of 15,600,000. Zerjav laid down his three-pair hand and Simionato was awarded the pot to increase his chip lead.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-HOLDEM

Erik Seidel for a heads-up match, with Mike happily mediating in the middle. Annie Duke walked up and asked what was happening.

Huck said, "I'm trying to set up a match with Erik where if I win, he owes me \$50,000, and if I lose, I have to cut off a foot." Annie quickly said she wanted in on the action and without hesitating a beat, Huck replied, "Okay, I'll lay you 2:1." We all started laughing and Mike launched into some good prop bet stories from his time, keeping us all entertained until the cards were in the air.

I had a rough start to my WPT career. I didn't cash in my first 17 events, only finally running deep at The Bike in 2007. I ended up busting in 20th place, but before the day began, Mike made it a point to come up to me and say that he had been looking forward to seeing me run deep in one of these events and he hoped to see me at the final table. I'm sure that is something he said all the time to people, but Mike had a sincerity about him that made you feel like he meant what he was saying and hadn't also just said it to the other 15 guys that were still in the event.

Just a few months after that *Legends of Poker* event, I ran great at the *Borgata Winter Open* and ended up winning it for \$1.4 million. After the event was over, they told me I had to stick around to do the winner's interview and pictures. Gladly! One of the pictures they wanted to take was with Mike and Vince Van Patton. I had been sick for the last couple days of the tournament, but I had plenty of energy and was all smiles for those photos.

Vince was a professional actor and TV host, so he could conjure up a smile for days. Mike was a poker player and was used to hiding his emotions. Also, Mike is such a genuine guy that it was probably hard for him to bring a fake smile to his face and make it look good. So as the cameras are clicking, I hear this little chuckle coming from behind me.

I didn't know what it was at first, but I eventually realized it was Mike chuckling out loud to himself so that he could bring out a genuine smile for the couple minutes that all these cameras were popping in front of our faces. He was a thoughtful guy and he didn't want any of the winners to feel cheated of their time in the spotlight. To this day, whenever my wife and I are taking a picture where we have to stay focused on the camera for a little bit, I do a little chuckle like Mike's to bring a genuine smile to both of our faces.

Even though I didn't know Mike that well, I had three or four stories ready to go about him. That, above all, should tell you why Mike means so much to so many in the poker world. He could make you feel like you were his friend in the course of the minutes, hours, or days that you got to play poker with him. ♠



Gavin Griffin was the first poker player to capture a World Series of Poker, European Poker Tour and World Poker Tour title and has amassed nearly \$5 million in lifetime tournament winnings. Griffin is sponsored by HeroPoker.com. You can follow him on Twitter

@NHGG

THE 1996 QUEENS POKER CLASSIC: FROM THE RAIL TO THE WINNER'S CIRCLE

By Mike Sexton

Editor's Note: The following excerpt is from Mike Sexton's first Card Player column, originally published Nov. 1, 1996 in Vol. 9, Issue No. 22. Sexton won the \$5,000 Queens Poker Classic Summer Edition main event for \$112,000. It was the ninth-largest score of his career.

This was a championship in which the crown looked like it was going to land on at least three other heads (and probably should have), but fortunately for me, it eventually settled on mine. It was a unique event for me in many ways.

Steve Morrow, the tournament director, has become very aware of how much the players appreciate the Gold Coast tournaments (they are legendary for starting on time), and did a nice job of starting all events during the Four Queens series on time. However, two minutes before the \$5,000 championship event started, I wasn't even in the tournament.

Frank Henderson came over and asked me if I was playing. I said that it didn't look like it, and he suggested that I piece myself out (something I've never done before). I asked

the guy with whom I was sitting if he would take 15 percent of me for \$1,000, and he agreed.

Scotty Nguyen then walked by and I asked him the same thing. He said that he would love to have me for a horse.

"My money is lucky money," he said, counting out his \$1,000. "I know that you are going to win with my money."

What a prophet he turned out to be!

So, with the help of Scotty, Russ, Joe, Luis, Pete, and Fernando, I was the last man to get into the tournament, and was playing for a 25 percent freeroll. I was very happy to get to play, and to have the opportunity to make some money.

This was a two-day event that was played down to nine players the first day, with the final table played on the second day. At the dinner break the first day, there were 14 players left. Phil Hellmuth was the tournament leader with more than 50,000 in chips, and I was the low man with about 5,000. At the time, it looked like another trophy was going to Hellmuth's house. He seemed to be in "dead

stroke.”

Dead stroke in poker jargon is similar to “the zone” that basketball players talk about, where they can’t miss. In poker, you know when to play a pot and when to get away from a hand. You also bet the precise amount when you want your opponent to call, and the precise amount needed to get your opponent to fold.

When Hellmuth is in dead stroke, he is in a league of his own. I would rank him the no. 1 seed in every hold’em tournament. (I invite anyone disagreeing with that opinion to see me prior to any hold’em event. It’s no accident that Hellmuth has five bracelets from Binion’s, all in hold’em!)

Hellmuth is not perfect, however, and when he takes some beats, he tends to develop “steamitis” and go on tilt. He was the chip leader with 12 players left, took a beat, and before you knew it, he was out of the tournament in the 12 hole.

I only wish that Hellmuth would improve his behavior at the table. He doesn’t fire cards at the dealer or blame them when he loses, but he talks too much about how bad his opponents play and seems to moan about almost every pot that he loses. I believe Hellmuth and the other former world champions, guys who have made millions playing poker, should set exemplary standards of behavior for the rest of us to follow.

After several hours of tedious play, we reached the final table. I went on a nice rush and started the final table in second chip position behind Donny Kerr, a great player from Sugarwood, Texas. Right on my heels were two true superstars in no-limit hold’em, Erik Seidel and former world champion Jim Bechtel.



These two men represent the very best of the poker world. The way that they play and conduct themselves represents the standard that all of us should try to attain. In fact, I want to compliment everyone at the final table. It was the way that poker should be played – very competitively, but with respect for both the dealers and opponents.

Tommy Vinas, the first person out at the final table, took a beat that I believe he will remember for a lifetime. The button raised and Vinas picked up two aces in the small blind. He went all in and was up against A-9 offsuit.

The flop came K-4-2 of different suits, followed by a nine on fourth street and a nine on the river. You are always happy when a player is eliminated at the final table, because you move up in money, but on this occasion, I knew that every player at the table hurt for Vinas. I know that I still ache for him. Poker, like life, can be very cruel at times.

After hours of play, it came down to Harry Thomas with

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2020 WPT World Online Championship
\$10,300 No-Limit Hold’em Main Event



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 55.0%
After Flop: 93.0%
After Turn: 82.0%

Phillip Mighall
37,200,000 Chips



Damian Salas
41,600,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 45.0%
After Flop: 6.0%
After Turn: 18.0%

PREFLOP

With six players remaining and blinds of 300,000-600,000 with a 75,000 ante, Phillip Mighall raised to 1,300,000 from the cutoff. Damian Salas called from the small blind.

FLOP



Salas checked. Mighall bet 900,000, and Salas called.

TURN



Salas bet 3,600,000, and Mighall called.

RIVER



Salas bet 9,000,000, and Mighall called.

ANALYSIS

Damian Salas entered the final table of this huge online event as the chip leader, but found himself in the middle of a tightly-contested battle during six-handed action. In this hand he picked up an enticing K-Q suited in the small blind and called a raise from Phillip Mighall in the cutoff. Mighall flopped two pair and made a small continuation bet of 900,000 into a pot of 3,700,000 after Salas checked. Salas held king high with backdoor straight and flush possibilities and opted to make the call. The 8♥ on the turn gave Salas the nut flush draw and he decided to semi-bluff, making a bet of roughly two-thirds the size of the pot. Mighall called with his aces and fours and the 6♦ completed the board. Both of the possible flush draws missed, but there were four cards to a straight on the board. Salas had just king high for showdown value. While his two hearts made it less likely that his opponent could also have that missed draw, there was also the missed club draw from the flop that he could fold out. He decided to bet 9,000,000 into the pot of 12,700,000. Mighall made the call with his two pair, catching Salas’ sizable bluff to move into a tie for the chip lead with Victor Simionato. Salas fell to fourth place on the leaderboard after this hand, but ultimately went on to finish in third place for \$814,663. Mighall knocked out the final three players, including Salas, to secure the title and the top prize of \$1,550,298.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-HOLDEM



“My money is lucky money,” said Scotty Nguyen, counting out his \$1,000. “I know that you are going to win with my money.”

110,000, Kerr with 90,000, and myself with 80,000. I went down to 30,000 and it wasn't looking very good for me. Thomas and Kerr then played a monster pot. Thomas had A-K and Kerry had A-Q.

At this point, if Thomas had won the pot, he would have had 250,000 in chips and would most likely be wearing the crown. But as fate would have it, the flop came Q-Q-8, and Kerr now became the odds-on favorite to win the champi-

onship, since Thomas and I only had about 30,000 each. I then broke Thomas, and started what turned out to be a several-hour heads-up battle with Kerr.

I doubled up first with two sevens against two sixes, won a little more, and then played the key pot. Kerr raised on the button, which he was correctly doing quite often, and I moved all in with the J♥9♥, just hoping to pick up the pot. Well he had A-K, so naturally he called me.

When the flop produced 8-6-3, it certainly looked like Kerr would be the champion, but a seven on fourth street and a 10 on the river gave me a straight, and for the first time in the tournament, I took the lead. It was over shortly thereafter when I had A-5 and he had K-J, and my hand held up.

To win a no-limit tournament, you must win your races, avoid the bad beats, draw out in some key pots, and generally play very well along the way. My win certainly fit into all of those categories. Simply put, it was just my day.

Special thanks again to all of my stake horses. It certainly proves that a piece of pie is better than no pie at all! ♠

TOURNAMENT HAND MATCHUP

2020 WPT World Online Championship
\$10,300 No-Limit Hold'em Main Event

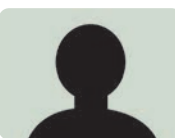


Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 56.0%
After Flop: 77.0%
After Turn: 77.0%

Blaz Zerjav
31,000,000 Chips



Victor Simionato
31,600,000 Chips



Winning Percentage
Before Flop: 43.0%
After Flop: 23.0%
After Turn: 23.0%

PREFLOP

With five players remaining and blinds of 350,000-700,000 with a 87,500 ante, Blaz Zerjav called from the small blind. Victor Simionato raised to 2,500,000 from the big blind. Zerjav called.



Zerjav checked, and Simionato bet 2,900,000. Zerjav called.



Zerjav checked. Simionato bet 6,900,000, and Zerjav called.



Zerjav checked. Simionato moved all-in for 19,300,000. Zerjav called all-in for 18,700,000.

ANALYSIS

Brazil's Victor Simionato won his way into this \$10,300 buy-in main event via a \$22 initial investment. He had to make his way through three rounds of satellite qualifiers in order to earn a seat in the big dance, and then had to contend with a 1,011-entry field featuring many of the best and most experienced players in the game. In this hand, he showed that the big stage wasn't going to prevent him from playing fearless, aggressive poker. Facing a small-blind limp from Blaz Zerjav, Simionato opted to raise to 2,500,000 with Q-J offsuit. Zerjav made the call with A-3 offsuit and picked up a gutshot straight draw and backdoor flush possibilities to go along with his ace high. He checked to Simionato, who bet 2,900,000 into the pot of 5,300,000 with his queen high. Zerjav made the call and the K♥ on the turn gave Simionato a gutshot straight draw while putting a second possible flush draw on the board. Zerjav checked, and Simionato fired a second barrel, betting 6,900,000 into the pot of 11,200,000. Zerjav called and was rewarded with the 4♥ on the river, which completed his five-high straight. He checked a third time and Simionato was left with less than a pot-sized bet remaining in his stack. He pulled the trigger and moved all-in, having Zerjav covered by around one big blind. Zerjav made the call with his straight to leave Simionato on fumes. The Brazilian qualifier was eliminated the next hand, earning \$391,257 as the fifth-place finisher. Zerjav placed fourth for \$552,006.

NOTE: WINNING PERCENTAGES DO NOT INCLUDE TIES. ODDS PROVIDED BY CARDPLAYER.COM/POKER-TOOLS/ODDS-CALCULATOR/TEXAS-HOLDEM



HIGH-STAKES GOLF AND WHY DOYLE BRUNSON IS THE MAN

By Mike Sexton

Editor's Note: The following excerpt is from Mike Sexton's Inside Professional Poker column, originally published Sept. 4, 1998 in Vol. 11, Issue No. 18 of Card Player Magazine.

Most high-stakes poker players love to play golf. Golf is the kind of game that provides those who are inclined an opportunity to gamble, something that most high-stakes players love to do. By spotting someone strokes or yardage, limiting the number of clubs that one player may use, or playing some type of scramble (hitting two balls and playing the best one), handicapping in golf can equalize any gap in skill level.

Poker players certainly are not golf purists. They don't play golf for fun, and most of the time, they don't care about golf rules. They prefer "gamblers' rules" (which means that you can never touch your ball until you reach the green, otherwise it's a one-stroke penalty). Gamblers' rules are simple and eliminate any arguments that might come up about rulings (such as casual water, where to drop from a cart path, and so on).

You would be amazed at the amount of money wagered



the
Odds of becoming President of the U.S.A.
10,000,000 to 1

Define your own odds.
www.CardPlayer.com/poker-tools/

Card Player

“Within three hours, Stu had lost \$80,000 to Strauss. Do you think that in the history of the United States, anyone has ever lost \$80,000 the first time they ever went to a golf course (and on the putting green, to boot)?”

by poker players on golf, and the unusual bets that are made (mostly during a poker game). For example, former world champion Huck Seed recently bet \$25,000 that he could shoot an 18-hole golf score of less than 100 four times in one day, but he had to do it with a 5-iron, wedge, and a putter, and he had to do it on foot in Las Vegas, where the temperature was higher than 110 degrees every day. He could play as many rounds as he wanted, but if he started a round, he had to finish 18 holes.

He shot 100 in his first round, but bounced back with scores of 97, 96, 93, and 92 to win the bet. He started at 6 a.m. and finished in near darkness, sprinting around the course like a young antelope.

Golf stories abound in the poker world. My all-time favorite is about Stu Ungar. Ungar grew up in New York and had never seen a golf course until he won the world poker title in 1980. Hall of Famer Jack Strauss had convinced Ungar that all of the action was on the golf course, and that's where he needed to be. So, Jack took Stuey to the golf course, explaining to him that before he could gamble at golf, he had to hit some balls and practice some.

He then led Ungar to the putting green. Within three hours, Stu had lost \$80,000 to Strauss. Do you think that in the history of the United States, anyone has ever lost \$80,000 the first time they ever went to a golf course (and on the putting green, to boot)?

I recently was involved in a big golf match. During a tournament at this year's *WSOP*, a match was made (scheduled to



The legendary Doyle Brunson with crutches in tow

be played two months later) in which Doyle Brunson and I were going to play Huck Seed and Howard Lederer.

We were playing the scramble from the red tees (ladies) and they were playing from the blue tees (championship). The original bet was a \$20,000 NASSAU (front nine, back nine, and total) with one automatic press a side, which means that it would be possible to win or lose five ways. It grew to be well over a \$100,000 NASSAU by game day, as Doyle had accepted all wagers from anyone wanting to be against us. The match drew quite a gallery, and garnered a lot of action. The 'sweaters' certainly got their money's worth, as the match could have gone either way.

Brunson has been 'The Man' in the poker world (and in the gambling world) for 25 years. He has so much heart. He thrives on challenges and really wanted to shoot down the young lions. Ailing from shoulder and hip operations, bad knees he could barely walk on, crutches he needed to get from the cart to the greens, fatigue, soreness, and the scorching heat of the hottest day in summer, he made a putt of about 45 feet on the 16th hole to turn the momentum our way. We luckily ended up winning two bets in a very close match.

It was a very memorable day for me, and one that I will cherish for the rest of my life. Doyle Brunson is still 'The Man!' ♠

'MISTAKES' ON THE MONEY BUBBLE

By Mike Sexton

Editor's Note: The following excerpt is from Mike Sexton's Inside Professional Poker column, originally published Feb. 21, 1997 in Vol. 10, Issue No. 4 of Card Player Magazine.

What a difference a tournament makes. At the *Queens Classic* in September, I experienced the thrill of victory by winning the \$5,000 no-limit hold'em championship event. However, at the recent *Queens Classic* in January, I experienced the agony of defeat by finishing "on the bubble" in

the \$5,000 championship event. I went from the penthouse to the outhouse, which is what all tournament players experience at one time or another.

For those of you who are not familiar with poker tournament jargon, the "bubble" represents the poor sap who has the misfortune of playing all day and finishing one out of the money. Just as every tournament has a winner, it also has someone who finishes on the bubble, and both people remember where they finished for quite a while.

At least the person on the bubble

is very popular with the remaining players, as they all break into a chorus of "We're in the money!" Perhaps we should put some fun into poker tournaments by awarding the person finishing on the bubble a box of bubble gum, or even a jar of bubbles you can blow into the air.

In the major tournaments, it usually takes a while to knock the bubble guy out. Play slows down dramatically, because no one wants to go out on the bubble. Strategy plays a key role at this time in a tournament, as the short stacks are hanging on simply trying to survive, while the aggressive players and chip leaders wisely attack, because most everyone plays very conservatively at this point. It is the most stressful time of a poker



tournament, especially if you are one of the short stacks.

Let me tell you two bubble stories that I will never forget. The first took place a fairly long time ago in a \$1,000 buy-in no-limit hold'em tournament in Las Vegas. The tournament was

down to 10 players, paying out nine places, with five remaining at each table. Like all tournaments, the director announced, "shuffle up and deal" on each hand, so that both tables would play an equal number of hands. This prevents stalling tactics by someone at one of the tables in the hopes that someone else will go broke.

Jack Straus, a former world champion and Hall of Famer, was in second-lowest chip position. At this point, he raised virtually every pot (at least 20 in a row). Everyone threw their hands away, looking over at the other table and hoping to see someone else go broke. No one did, so Straus kept raising and went from nearly last place to second place in the chip standings just by picking up the blinds and antes. Finally, he was in the big blind and the small blind moved all in. He picked up two kings and broke the guy.

The finalists assembled at the final table, and on the break, I went up to Straus to congratulate him on his performance with 10 players left. I was stunned when he looked at me and said, "Mike I can't believe I made such a bad mistake."

I said, "Jack, what are you talking about?"

He said, "Nobody was playing a pot and I should have mucked my two kings and let that guy have it. I could have picked up several more rounds of blinds before he went broke."

Talk about perception! Trust me, this guy belongs in the Hall of Fame. And, yes, he won the tournament.

My other bubble memory occurred in the 1992 \$10,000 no-limit hold'em world championship at Binion's Horseshoe. It could very well be the longest time in poker history that it took to eliminate a player from the bubble. We were down to 37 players and it must have taken at least two hours to lose a player.

Hamid Dastmalchi, the eventual champion, was at my table. During the bubble, he grabbed the momentum and the chips, going from 35,000 to 100,000. Dastmalchi was brilliant throughout the tournament, but I am convinced that it was his Straus-like performance on the bubble that propelled him to victory and the world title.

Best of luck to all of you in staying off the bubble. ♠

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OCTOBER

Oct. 24-25

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AO-Add On **B**-Bonus **CP**-Crazy Pineapple **H.O.R.S.E.**-Hold'em, Omaha Eight-or-Better, Razz, Seven-Card Stud, Seven-Card Stud Eight-or-Better **R.O.S.E.**-Razz, Omaha Eight-or-Better, Seven-Card Stud, Seven-Card Stud Eight-or-Better **KO**- Knock Out or Bounty **LH**-Limit Hold'em **MP**-Mexican Poker **NLH**-No-Limit Hold'em **O H/L**-Omaha Eight-or-Better **PLO**-Pot-Limit Omaha **RB**-Rebuy **SH/L**-Seven-Card Stud Eight-or-Better **SLH**-Spread-Limit Hold'em

ARIZONA

TALKING STICK RESORT - SCOTTSDALE

MONDAY-THURSDAY

10:15 a.m. NLH, \$125

FRIDAY-SATURDAY

10:15 a.m. NLH, \$200

CALIFORNIA

OCEAN'S ELEVEN - OCEANSIDE

DAILY

9:00 a.m. NLH, \$55 AO \$5

FLORIDA

BESTBET - JACKSONVILLE

FRIDAY

12:00 p.m. NLH, \$160

SUNDAY

12:00 p.m. NLH, \$160

PALM BEACH KENNEL CLUB - W. PALM BEACH

FRIDAY - SATURDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$120

ILLINOIS

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MONDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$120 KO \$25

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$140

TUESDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$140

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$120 KO \$25

WEDNESDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$130

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$130

THURSDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$150

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$160 KO \$50

FRIDAY

12:15 p.m. NLH, \$220

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$320 KO \$75

SATURDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$300

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$150

SUNDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$100

6:15 p.m. NLH, \$130

MGM NATIONAL HARBOR - OXON HILL

MONDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$240 (\$6K Guarantee)

TUESDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

WEDNESDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

7:15 p.m. NLH, \$140 (\$3.5K Guarantee)

THURSDAY

11:15 a.m. NLH, \$240 (\$6K Guarantee)

7:15 p.m. NLH/PLO, \$240 (\$5K Guarantee)

NEVADA

SAHARA - LAS VEGAS

SATURDAY & SUNDAY

1:00 p.m. NLH, \$120 RB \$100

VENETIAN HOTEL & CASINO - LAS VEGAS

MONDAY

12:10 p.m. NLH, \$150 (\$4K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 KO \$25 (\$2K Guarantee)

TUESDAY

12:10 p.m. NLH, \$150 (\$4K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$200 KO \$50 (\$4K Guarantee)

WEDNESDAY

12:10 p.m. NLH, \$150 (\$4K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 (\$2K Guarantee)

THURSDAY

12:10 p.m. NLH, \$150 (\$4K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 KO \$25 (\$3K Guarantee)

FRIDAY

12:10 p.m. NLH, \$200 AO \$100 (\$10K Guarantee)

SATURDAY

12:10 p.m. NLH, \$340 (\$12K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 (\$2K Guarantee)

SUNDAY

12:10 p.m. NLH, \$250 (\$7K Guarantee)

6:10 p.m. NLH, \$125 (\$2K Guarantee)

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CAREER LIVE TOURNAMENT EARNINGS OF POKER COMMENTATORS

Commentator	Poker Show	Live Tournament Earnings
Nick Schulman	Super High Roller Bowl	\$12,842,476
Mike Sexton	World Poker Tour	\$6,001,739
Tony Dunst	World Poker Tour	\$4,086,727
Maria Ho	World Poker Tour, Heartland Poker Tour	\$3,784,630
Phil Gordon	Celebrity Poker Showdown	\$2,036,716
Gabe Kaplan	High Stakes Poker	\$1,388,533
Norman Chad	World Series of Poker	\$88,917
Lon McEachern	World Series of Poker	\$59,771
Joe Stapleton	European Poker Tour, The Big Game	\$11,805
Ali Nejad	Poker After Dark, Super High Roller Bowl	\$5,710

Mike Sexton might be best known to many casual poker fans for his work as a commentator on the *WPT*'s televised broadcasts, but he was also a very accomplished tournament player, with multiple major titles and more than \$6 million in career live tournament earnings. Sexton will go down in history as one of the greatest player-commentators in the history of the game, having achieved so much in both fields.

Many of Sexton's fellow poker commentators and analysts have also found success playing when they aren't calling the action. In recent years more high-stakes poker pros like Nick Schulman, Maria Ho, and Tony Dunst have brought their experience to televised poker broadcasts. Schulman has covered high-stakes events like the *Super High Roller Bowl* in recent years, while remaining active as a cash game and tournament player. He has accumulated more than \$12.8 million in tournament scores, including winning his third career *WSOP* bracelet during the 2019 series in Las Vegas.

Tony Dunst, who was Sexton's replacement in the *WPT* booth, has the third-highest career earnings with just shy of \$4.1 million. While Ali Nejad has the smallest tournament earnings of any player shown on this list, he is a regular cash-game player, often seen playing in mixed games where any given pot could dwarf his career tournament total. *High Stakes Poker* commentator Gabe Kaplan might be best known to the public as an actor and comedian who starred in the 1970's sitcom *Welcome Back, Kotter*, but he is also an avid player who has participated in big cash games and tournaments. His biggest title run came in *Amarillo Slim's Superbowl of Poker* in 1980 for \$190,000.

Nick Schulman
and Ali Nejad

Tony Dunst





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