

# **The Ultimate Guide to the WSOP, 2011**

*By Kill Phil author and WSOP bracelet-winner, Blair Rodman.*

## **Part I:**

I was walking through Binion's not long ago, which I make it a point to do whenever I'm in downtown Las Vegas, and felt more than a tinge of sadness at the state of the casino that holds so many great memories for me. I sat at the snack bar near the poker room and was reminiscing with a girl sitting at the counter who's father had worked at the World Series of Poker (WSOP) in the old days. We talked of the good times, the character of Binion's establishment and the characters who populated the WSOP over the years and bemoaned the loss of so many of the things that made those times so special. Closed or gone completely are the hotel tower, the excellent deli, which was located near the now-defunct sportsbook, an area which was a hub of activity during the tournament, the downstairs coffee shop, and Gee Joon, the Chinese restaurant where I shared so many meals with players over the years (even the snack bar where we talked has since shut down).

Much more vivid were my memories of the times I've had and the players who have passed through my poker life at the Horseshoe over the years. Some are still around, others have passed, but all live on as a part of poker history. I want to impart to the reader the things I have learned over the years about the WSOP so you can make the most of your WSOP experience.

## **WSOP HISTORY**

The World Series of Poker was spawned in 1969 at the Holiday Casino in Reno, NV, when Tom Moore and Vic Vickrey came up with the idea of a "Texas Gamblers Reunion" in order to bring business to their casino. The list of attendees included many of the legendary poker players of that era, including Doyle Brunson, "Amarillo" Slim Preston, Puggy Pearson, Crandall Addington, Bill Boyd, Sid Wyman, Sailor Roberts, Jack Straus, Aubrey Day, Johnny Moss, Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder, Minnesota Fats, and Charles Harrelson (father of actor Woody Harrelson, later convicted of murdering a federal judge).

Moore and Vickrey hoped that the gamblers would liven up their casino pit games, but when they found that the attendees were only interested in gambling with one another at the poker tables, they passed on the idea of repeating the event the following year. Benny Binion, a Texas-born gambler who had come to Las Vegas some 20 years earlier and owned the Horseshoe Casino downtown, was at the Reno affair and saw the possibilities in a convention of poker players and, together with his son Jack, staged the first World Series of Poker at the Horseshoe in 1970, where it remained for the next 34 years.

In the early days, the WSOP was largely populated by "road gamblers" who traveled the back roads of the Southern poker circuit, primarily in Texas. The gathering at the Horseshoe was reminiscent of the "rendezvous" of the Old West, when fur traders, mountain men, and other denizens of the wilderness gathered annually to do business, play games, and tell stories of their past year's adventures. There was no actual tournament at this first World Series. Instead, players were asked to vote for the best player, and after a first vote where everyone voted for themselves, they were asked to vote for the second-best player and Johnny Moss got the nod, cementing his reputation as the premier player of the era.

In 1971, Ted Thackrey of the Los Angeles Times suggested to Benny that he stage a winner-take-all, "freezeout-style" event that would generate national publicity. Benny, ever the promoter, saw the light. Perhaps he was thinking back to the poker game he staged at the Horseshoe in 1949 (or 1951, accounts differ) between Johnny Moss and Nick "The Greek" Dandelos and how the public watched with fascination as the great players battled on the felt. Benny set it up and the WSOP Main Event (ME) was born. The entry fee was \$5K and only six players entered—Doyle (now a one-name icon), Puggy Pearson (the only non-Texan), Jimmy Casella, Jack Straus, Sailor Roberts, and Moss. The winner was Moss (validating the 1970 ballot). That year was also significant in that four preliminary events were held as a lead-up to the ME.

In 1972 the buy-in was raised to \$10K and "Amarillo" Slim and Roger Van Ausdall joined the previous year's competitors. When it got down to three players, neither Doyle nor Puggy wanted the publicity (or IRS scrutiny) that would go along with winning the title and decided to let Slim win. While this would never happen in today's climate, it might have been the best thing possible for the upstart WSOP. Slim played it for all it was worth, hitting the talk-show circuit and writing a book. By the time the next year's tournament came around, the WSOP was in the national spotlight and poker's popularity was beginning to spread.

In 1973, Tennessee-born Puggy got over his publicity shyness and proved that it wasn't only Texans who could play the game, as he beat 12 players, including runner-up Johnny Moss, to run away with the title. Prompted by Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder, CBS filmed the impressive performance, which was featured on "CBS Sports Spectacular." (The documentary-style film can be found on [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com).) While clips from the ME would be shown sporadically over the next few years, it wouldn't be filmed as a stand-alone event again until 1978, when, again encouraged by "The Greek," who'd been hired for NFL football, CBS returned to the Horseshoe to film the ME. Joining "The Greek" as host was Brent Musberger.

I was at the Horseshoe for the final table in 1978 and saw Musberger standing near the elevator, waiting for things to begin. While I knew who he was and was kind of jazzed to see someone famous (I was from a small town and got a kick out of seeing celebrities at that time), I remember he was kind of stand-offish, not even acknowledging my efforts to talk to him. He was dressed in a plain suit and looked kind of like a bellman or

something. I was amused when two young girls who apparently had the same impression walked up to him and asked, "Hey mister, where's the bathroom?"

The road gamblers continued to dominate the event. Johnny Moss won again in 1974, Sailor Roberts in 1975, Doyle won back-to-back titles in 1976-77, and Oklahoma-born Bobby "the Owl" Baldwin broke through in 1978, beating a then-record 42 opponents. Bobby got only half the \$420k prize pool, as the '78 tournament marked the first time the winner didn't take all. The prize pool was spread among the last five finishers. It was also the year of the first female entry in the ME, a player named Barbara Freer.

The 1979 ME brought an end to the road gamblers' domination of the WSOP, as an unknown amateur named Hal Fowler rode an unbelievable run of luck to defeat the very talented and crest-fallen runner-up Bobby Hoff. The next two years, 1980 and 1981, belonged to New York-bred whiz-kid Stu Ungar, who won a third title in 1997, shortly before his untimely death in 1998.

I would have loved to have been a player during those early road-gambler years, but the closest I came was a brief visit in 1977, when I drove up from California to catch the scene. I remember watching a cash game on a table set up in a little alcove that housed the baccarat pit during the rest of the year. A player was nonchalantly shuffling a stack of \$100 chips and my first poker goal was born—to be able to sit in a game and shuffle those blacks chips like they meant nothing.

## **MY WSOP**

In 1980 I became a resident of Las Vegas and, while I'd played poker in the streets of my hometown of Troy in upstate New York since I was 11 years old, it was the first time that poker for me became a full-time endeavor. Indulge me for a few pages while I take a detour from the written history of the WSOP and recount my history and experiences at the world's greatest gambling tournament.

By the early '80s the WSOP was the focal point of my year, as it was for every poker player. I recall vividly the excitement and sense of anticipation as spring arrived in Las Vegas, which meant the WSOP was soon to begin. In those days the WSOP was held in late April/early May, one of the best times of the year in Las Vegas. It was the perfect time for the tournament. Players from cold climes got to come and enjoy the great Vegas springtime. School was still in session, so there were no kids' graduations to keep the players home. The weather was perfect for high-stakes golf games, which were a prominent item on the menu of many attendees. And the tournament wound down just in time for the beginning of summer.

During the WSOP, poker players, bookmakers, golf hustlers, prop hustlers, and in short, just about every kind of gambler and angle-shooter imaginable was at the Horseshoe. I remember looking around and thinking that, at any given time, a large chunk of the country's GGP (gross gambling product) was in that room! I'd always go down a few

days early to watch them set up the room, ingest the atmosphere, and generally get psyched up.

Every year, the first game in the room, 50-100 8-or-better stud, would start on the front corner table with the arrival of John and Harry from New York, who anchored the game for the duration. Management was prepared, and had their table set up and ready to go well before the rest of the room was finished. It filled immediately with players who couldn't wait to get in action. It was the one game that went night and day and was the last game to break, usually well after the Main Event champion had been crowned.

The side games that sprung up as players busted out of the ME were usually the biggest and best of the entire tournament. Players stuck and looking to get out, winning and looking to add to their bankroll, or who just didn't want it all to end, played until workers pulled the tables out from under them.

I'm not certain which year I entered my first event, but I believe it was a preliminary in 1982, the year the ME topped 100 players for the first time and was won by road gambler Jack Straus.

As the tournament grew, management had to put tables everywhere, including in other casinos. One time I began play in a preliminary event at the Four Queens and was moved to the Fremont before finally winding up back at the Shoe, making, as Tournament Director Jack McClelland would say, the "final casino!" I remember watching the final table of the ME that year watching Terry Rogers, a famous bookmaker from Ireland, and El Cortez owner Jackie Gaughan book bets on the event, and Stuey Ungar standing on a table and screaming out props to all takers. It was a chaotic scene that had everyone's juices flowing. Unfortunately, the Nevada Gaming Commission put a stop to the on-site bookmaking, but it was fun while it lasted. Actually, a little thing like a warning from the authorities wasn't going to stop gamblers from doing what they do, it just wasn't as wide open after that.

In 1983 the original WSOP Tournament Director, Eric Drache, came up with the idea of "satellites," single- or multi-table mini-tournaments that awarded seat(s) into the main tournaments. This was a great development for the WSOP in general and for me in particular, as it gave me a chance to work my way into some events that I couldn't afford to buy into directly. Eric entrusted recently-deceased "Satellite" Sam Gamburg to put his idea into practice, which he did with great enthusiasm and proficiency.

Local player Tom McEvoy demonstrated the power of the satellite that very year, gaining entry to the ME through a satellite and going on to claim the title. I remember playing a cash game with a bunch of locals at the Bingo Palace (now Palace Station) and getting reports throughout the night of Tom's protracted battle with fellow grinder Rod Peate. When he won we celebrated, as one of our own had broken through to the big time, giving us all reason to hope and dream. Today satellites are a primary route of entry into every major tournament around the world.

In 1984, Anthony Curtis obtained press passes for him and me. Jack and Benny Binion knew the value of publicity and made sure the press was well taken care of. The only people valued more than the press were the players. Those were the days! As well as wandering the poker floor and getting close to the big-name players, Anthony and I had access to the legendary player's buffet in the rear of the downstairs coffee shop. It featured just about every type of sea and land creature imaginable; mountains of cold seafood, rattlesnake, moose, ostrich, reindeer, antelope, and on and on. It was a very special feeling to be welcomed in that room. The security guard at the door of the buffet that year was Kenny Lambert, who went on to be WSOP Tournament Director in 2005 and is now the very capable manager of the poker room at the Beau Rivage in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Anthony and I were ringside in 1984 for that incredible final table, which featured six-time ME final-table contestant Jesse Alto, Byron "Cowboy" Wolford\*, and eventual champion Jack Keller. That was the year Binion's replaced the chips with bundles of cash when it got to three-handed. I remember Cowboy tossing those bundles at Jesse in one of the most famous bluffs in history, which led to Jesse's demise.\*\* I knew Jesse well. He really wanted to win the "Big One," but never quite got there, coming closest in 1976 when he finished second to Brunson.

(\*Cowboy was very likable and interesting. I always looked forward to seeing and talking with him. In 2003, I hadn't seen him yet and asked a bunch of players seated together if anyone had. A spooky chilling hush was all that came back. He'd passed away that morning.)

(\*\*Cowboy's book, Cowboys, Gamblers & Hustlers: The True Adventures of a Rodeo Champion & Poker Legend, gives this account from Bobby Baldwin. "It started when the A9 of clubs and a diamond king flopped. When Woldford bet \$15,000 at Jesse he was committed to the right-down-to-the-river bluff. When the king of hearts showed up on the fourth board card, he sent \$40,000 more into the pot. Jesse called. The deuce of spades was the final card and Cowboy showed what he was made of, pushing his last \$110,000 toward the center of the table. After a long consideration Alto slid his cards toward the dealer. The cowboy had won the money but the hand was so important to Keller's game when Woldford exercised a psychological option in choosing to show his nothing-but-nerve cards. In effect, that was the end of the tournament. And in retrospect, the real winner of that key hand was Jack Keller, but the bluff took Cowboy to an eventual second-place finish and \$264,000. And maybe he'll get a new Stetson from Jack Keller."

In the same book, Wolford described it like this. "When I pushed my last \$110,000 into the center at the river, Jesse must've studied what to do for five minutes, with the cameras and lights on us and (wife) Evelyn and my son sitting on the rail watching. While Jesse was pondering, I looked over at them and winked and smiled. Finally he threw his hand away. Then I showed him my cards, a 53! When Jesse saw them, he got on tilt and went nuts, bluffed off all his money, every bit of it, to Jack Keller on the next two deals.")

During the '80s, the WSOP was still a smallish affair and everybody knew each other. Jack Binion was always a presence and made it a point to get to know the players and keep his finger on the pulse of the tournament. (He always had his own little "private" game that was only for players he'd hand-picked. It's good to be the king!) Eric Drache was the Tournament Director starting in 1973, aided by Frank Cutrona. Eric had personality galore and I liked him a lot. There may have never been anyone better at borrowing money than Eric, a trait that eventually got him into trouble. After some rough times, Eric rebounded as a consultant on high-profile TV poker shows, such as "High Stakes Poker," and is doing well.

"Cactus" Jack McClelland began his tenure in 1984, and was the floor director of the tournament during its growth in the '80s. His iconic cry of "shuffle up and deal" is a staple at the WSOP to this day, as well as at many tournaments around the globe. After running tournaments world-wide during the '90s, Jack shed the "Cactus" moniker and settled in as tournament director at the Bellagio.

Year after year, many of the same dealers, floor people, cocktail waitresses, bartenders, security guards, and other personnel were regular fixtures at the WSOP and had a great rapport with the players. The bars were jumping late into the night and everybody hung out, making new friends, setting up the next day's golf games, and telling tales of the day's happenings.

In 1988 the Binions bought the next door Mint Casino, knocked down a wall, and more than doubled the size of their operation, adding much-needed floor space to handle the rapidly expanding tournament. The Mint came with a high-rise hotel tower, which gave players access to a large number of more modern on-site hotel rooms, a vast improvement over the small number of quaint(to be generous) old rooms on the Horseshoe side. The excellent Binion's Steakhouse was opened on the top floor of the hotel tower and quickly became a favorite among players.

When the Golden Nugget closed its poker room in 1988, Binion's opened its first regular poker room. Jim Albrecht, who was the poker manager at the Mint, took over the Binion's operation and ran both the regular room and the WSOP until 1998. Jimmy was a good guy and I was saddened to hear of his passing in 2003.

Benny Binion was a fixture at the casino he created, but until they bought the Mint, he was usually ensconced in his private booth in the downstairs coffee shop. While I never felt comfortable entering that space, once they acquired the Mint he spent a lot of his time

sitting at an accessible desk by the valet entrance and I took every opportunity to talk with him, or rather listen to his great stories and words of wisdom. I love the old-time gamblers and I'm very glad I took the time to experience a little of Benny Binion before his death in 1989.

The first week of the tournament was when loose money was plentiful. That's about how long it took for most of the live ones to "get broke." Then the regular players settled into a routine and things got a bit tougher. The only problem for me in those days was that there was so much going on and I was so full of energy that I couldn't sit still. If I was in a tournament, I was drooling over the side games, or a golf match I could be playing. If I skipped the day's tournament, I regretted passing up the chance to make a score in the tournament and possibly make history (although at that time, the only one who really understood that dynamic was Phil Hellmuth, who never missed a tournament). If I was on the golf course, I couldn't wait to get back to the Shoe and see what was going on.

The preliminary events had much smaller fields and were shorter in duration in those days, usually wrapping up in a single day. None of the prelims were scheduled for two days until the mid '90s, and that was over the objection of Jack McClelland. He wanted the events to end quickly so players would get back to their other activities—like cash games and golf matches—and he could catch a little rest in his schedule of 24-hour days. Jack knew that if events were scheduled for two days, players would clamor for a slower structure and events would stretch out even longer, which is exactly what happened. In the new millennium, the swollen fields forced the prelims to go to three days or more to come to a conclusion.

The Binions had class. They wanted every player to have a great experience and to enjoy their hospitality. Food comps flowed freely. Final-table participants from all events received an embroidered satin jacket. (They made great gifts for friends over the years.) And the Binions understood gamblers. The sports book was right in the middle of the action and there were plenty of TVs for sports-betting poker players (which is most of them). On Derby Day, Jack McClelland gave everyone an hour break so they could watch the race.

Don't get me wrong, the Binions weren't a totally altruistic outfit. They knew if they took care of the players they'd feel obligated to satisfy their tendencies for playing in the pit. Unlike the original convention in 1969, the WSOP in the '80s attracted gamblers of all kinds. The action in the crap pit in those days was amazing.

By 1990 the WSOP had become an international affair. Iranian-born Mansour Matloubi became the first non-American to win the ME, topping a field of 194 players. It was the last time the ME would see fewer than 200 entrants. Floor space was becoming a bigger issue, as the expanding cash games, satellites, and 14 preliminary events all had a significant footprint.

In 1997, Binion's decided to enclose the Mint's valet area in a big tent to accommodate more tables. The biggest cash game, featuring Doyle Brunson, Chip Reese, et al., was in

a corner nearest the street, separated only by thin canvas. Aside from problems regulating the temperature, one night security guards found some scary dudes with bad intentions lurking just outside. The tent experiment lasted only a year, with the Binions finally giving in and closing down their profitable bingo room on the second floor for the duration of the WSOP the following year. It became the main tournament room until the WSOP left the Horseshoe.

The final table of the ME was held on the main floor downstairs throughout the '90s, (except for 1997 when they experimented with holding it outside on Fremont Street. A combination of extreme heat and wind caused difficulties and that experiment was also short-lived.) Bleachers were set up so fans could see the action. I rarely missed a final table. ESPN usually covered the ME, employing different poker and Hollywood celebrities in the announcer's booth, such as Gabe Kaplan and Dick van Patten, whose son Vince followed his footsteps to become a well-known color commentator on the World Poker Tour television broadcasts. I recall looking at the booth once and Dick was sound asleep. Remember, those were the days before the hole-card cam. Poker can be pretty boring to watch when all you can see are the community cards.

Until 2001, the televised ME final table was played six-handed. Making that TV table was very important, as it was the only way for a poker player to get television exposure in those days. I remember watching them play to the final six in 1992. With seven left, Johnny Chan raised, Hamid Dastmalchi re-raised, and Mike Alsaadi went all-in with pocket aces. Ordinarily, a player would hope to get called in that spot, as he figured to be a big favorite, but Mike wanted to make the TV table so badly that he didn't want to take a chance at getting drawn out on and did everything but actually show his cards to let Hamid know that he had aces. Hamid took the hint, wisely folded his kings, and went on to win the championship. Mike finished 4th and Chan was the TV "bubble boy."

In 1993 I covered the WSOP for Casino Player magazine and watched John Bonetti make his amazing run for the championship. I'd never seen as impressive a performance as John's, even though he fell short when he made his famous gaff against eventual winner Jim Bechtel when they were three-handed.\* Even though he didn't win, I made Bonetti the focus of my article. The editors didn't appreciate my take, wanting to feature Bechtel. Sorry Jim, and congrats on your win, but John was the star of that show. (\*In the fatal hand, Bonetti allowed severely short-stacked Glen Cozen to move into second place when he played, lost, and was eliminated in a huge pot with Bechtel. While roundly criticized for not waiting until Cozen was eliminated before taking on Bechtel heads-up, a move that cost him \$210k, slowing down at that point simply wasn't Bonetti's way.)

Nineteen-ninety-three was also the year of Archie Karas' legendary runner, turning a borrowed \$10K stake into some \$30 million, before giving it all back—every penny. He went up against the best poker players in heads-up matches, beating the likes of Chip Reese, Stuey Ungar, and Puggy Pearson, until they decided that it was all but impossible to overcome Archie's blatant disregard for money and everyone stopped playing him. Archie then hit the crap tables at the Horseshoe and ran \$7 million he'd won at poker to

that \$30 million zenith. I remember watching him play craps for hours. It was a real spectacle. He had a table reserved just for him and covered the layout with \$5,000 chips. At one point he had every \$5K chip the Horseshoe owned in his possession. It was a sight to see! I don't know if there's ever been a gambler like Archie.

Throughout the '90s the WSOP continued to expand in duration, getting to the point where it was about four weeks long. The number of events increased, as did the international contingent and the number of participants in the ME. In 1991, the ME champion was guaranteed a million dollars and Brad Daugherty joined the short list of tournament poker millionaires.

In spite of the increased attendance, Jack Binion did his best to keep the homey feeling of the road-gambler convention alive. While the exotic player's buffet downstairs was long gone, food comps were still plentiful for the excellent deli, snack bars, and other restaurants. The family atmosphere continued to be fostered among the players and employees. But time's march brings with it changes that threaten all our institutions. The Horseshoe, and therefore the WSOP, wasn't immune. Downtown casinos were struggling, as a procession of modern megaresorts on the Strip were rendering the old sawdust joints obsolete. More important, the death of Binion matriarch Teddy Jane Binion led to bitter family squabbles related to the ownership of the casino.

In 1999, Jack Binion surrendered control of the Horseshoe and the WSOP to his sister, Becky Behnen. I think Jack, ever the savvy businessman, saw the writing on the wall and reluctantly left the casino he grew up in for greener pastures, opening casinos in lucrative markets around the country. (Jack left the casino but took with him the name "Horseshoe" which he named his various other casino ventures. The downtown casino is still called "Binion's" even though none of the Binion family are involved.) Becky did her best to maintain the WSOP, but with Jack's departure, the good old days were over and the WSOP would never be the same.

In the early days of the WSOP, the Horseshoe was a thriving casino that attracted the biggest and most serious gamblers in the world. Whether the WSOP, with the necessity of disrupting normal operations to make room for the tournament, actually benefitted the Horseshoe's bottom line is questionable. But Benny and Jack were part of the old-school gambling culture and both placed a value on the WSOP that went beyond the profit motive. To be fair to Becky, she inherited an operation in crisis, but Becky knew her main asset was the WSOP and that her chance for survival hinged on the profit potential the tournament offered. Toward that end, she instituted radical changes that made it plain that the "family" culture was a thing of the past. Players and employees were now more like pawns in a quest for profits. Under Becky's reign, the house take on the tournaments, satellites, and cash games increased significantly, the generous food comps and lavish player buffets became a fond memory and there arose an adversarial feel between players and management.

Dealers, who had traditionally done very well during the WSOP, found that a big chunk of money withheld from prize pools, purportedly as dealer tips, were being used to pay hotel staff. Dealers who protested were fired, many of whom were WSOP veterans.

Jack's pals Doyle and Chip supported him by boycotting the tournament. Paul Phillips, an Internet whiz-kid who'd made a splash on the poker scene, made some critical comments to the press about the state of affairs and was barred from the premises.

Personally, my consternation with regard to these developments at my beloved WSOP came to a boil with Paul's barring and I chose to stay away. In fact, I continued my hiatus after Paul was forgiven and reinstated, but eventually came to terms with the fact that the old WSOP was something that would never be the same, but even in its present state, was

still the best poker had to offer. This is a concession I still have to justify to myself every year.

During Becky's reign, the WSOP lost much of its luster. Players still came in droves and the ME attracted worldwide interest, but there was a feeling among veteran participants that the best days of the WSOP were done. Poker was on the decline throughout Las Vegas. Poker rooms were closing and many of my poker-playing friends relocated to the greener-felt pastures of L.A. The ongoing viability of the WSOP was in doubt.

By 2003, Internet poker had begun its rise in popularity. Televised poker shows, notably the new World Poker Tour, had introduced poker fans to the drama inherent in knowing the player's hole cards during the playing of a hand. The three-headed monster of Internet, TV, and hole-card cam were turning things around when the WSOP, and the poker world in general, got a gift in the person of one Chris MoneyMaker. When the perfectly named Cinderella man parlayed a \$39-buy-in online satellite into a \$2.5 million victory over 838 players in the Main Event, the poker world exploded! Soon, the top poker players became celebrities and top celebrities were becoming poker players. Mainstream America ate it up.

Prior to the 2004 WSOP, Becky sold Binion's to the Harrah's corporation, who got one of the bargains of the century. Harrah's wanted nothing to do with running the old casino, but had big plans for the plum of the deal, rights to the WSOP. At that time I made the decision to forego cash-game poker and focus on tournaments. I had just turned fifty and didn't feel I could participate in both disciplines and do justice to either. My tournament-dedicated career's coming-out party was the 2004 WSOP, the last year the WSOP would be held at Binion's. It was by far my most successful effort, with six cashes, three final tables, including my first-ever televised poker appearance in a no-limit event won by Scott Fischman, and a 54<sup>th</sup>-place finish in the ME. The winner, Greg Raymer, triumphed over 2575 players and took home \$5 million. (I wrote a diary for the WSOP that year for the Las Vegas Advisor website, and continued to do so through 2006. All my reports from the WSOP and other tournaments are archived at [killphilpoker.com](http://killphilpoker.com).) Every year I tell myself I'm going to get in top physical shape for the WSOP, but you know how that goes. As a result of the extremely long and stressful hours I suffered from complete exhaustion at the end of the tournament.

There was no longer a casual feel to the WSOP, with the expanded television coverage and opportunities for sponsorship by Internet poker sites. The WSOP had become big business for everyone involved.

Harrah's brought in a new team to run the WSOP in 2004, led by Matt Savage. I thought they did a great job, especially considering the space limitations for the bloated fields. In fact, I was so impressed that I wrote that I thought the WSOP was in the perfect hands to carry forward. Rumor had it, and was later confirmed, that the WSOP would be leaving Binion's for Harrah's-owned Rio the following year, a necessary step considering the floor-space limitations. Other than a nostalgic return to Binion's for the ME final table in 2005, the WSOP had outgrown its birthplace and would never return.

My excitement at the new stewardship of the WSOP was short-lived. The first indication was when Harrah's let Matt Savage and his team go, instead employing an in-house team, headed up by Ken Lambert, who had gone far since his security guard days at the Horseshoe. It would be unfair to lay the blame for the deteriorating condition of the WSOP at Ken's feet. He had good intentions but his hands were tied by corporate higher-ups. The list of player grievances grew quickly.

In a significant development, the WSOP was expanded to six weeks and forty-five events, up from thirty-three in 2004, and was moved from the spring to early summer. Golf games dried up as the heat and the grueling schedule took a toll. There were myriad other issues. To summarize, players were paying a lot more and getting a lot less than in the old days. There was an unmistakable feeling that the players, who pay for everything through the house rake, were pawns in a much larger corporate game. I'd long advocated that the card rooms should sell advertising space on the felt and use the proceeds to reduce entry fees and therefore strengthen the poker economy. I had it half right -- WSOP tables were covered with logos, but nothing came back to the players.

The lowest point in the history of the WSOP as far as playing conditions, was probably 2006. While I still managed four cashes, it was hard to stay focused with the negative vibes emanating from disgruntled players. On the plus side, the Internet poker sites kept a large presence, putting on fabulous parties featuring great food, entertainment, and about every female model west of the Mississippi. Fueled by internet qualifiers, the Main Event swelled to 8,773 players and Jamie Gold's \$12 million championship prize was by far the largest before or since.

After the 2006 WSOP, two events altered the direction of the WSOP. On the plus side, newly appointed WSOP commissioner Jeffrey Pollack responded to player grievances by forming the Players Action Committee (PAC). To his credit, he listened to the players and many things improved the following year, although there were still numerous issues. On the negative side, right-wing politicians, led by Senator John Kyl, snuck through a rider, called the Unlawful Internet Gaming Enforcement Act (UIGEA), on an important national-security bill. There was no debate and few who signed the bill knew of the contents of the UIGEA. The UIGEA is a threat to Internet poker sites and severely limited their presence at the WSOP. One consequence was that sites were no longer able to enter satellite winners directly in the events, as they had in past years. As a result, the attendance at the 2007 ME dropped to 6,358 as Jerry Yang took down the championship and \$8,250,000.

Personally, it was hard to let go of the fact that the WSOP would never be like it was in the old days, and in 2007 I vowed to stop letting conditions affect me and focus on playing poker. The PAC was getting some results and things were improving. My renewed dedication was rewarded with my first bracelet, in a \$2K no-limit hold 'em event that attracted more than 2,000 players. Unfortunately, that was the year they decided to try to squeeze even more revenue from the player's efforts by enclosing certain final tables, mine among them, in a small tent in the middle of the floor to be shown on pay-per-view basis on the internet. Instead of the experience of having my

finest moment at the WSOP happening in front of a live audience in the main stadium, I was sequestered in the tent and allowed few rooters. On the plus side, I was able to see every hand I played, including my opponent's hole cards, on a replay.

Conditions continued to improve in certain areas in 2008-2009, although the one untouchable subject was player participation in any of the profits their money and efforts generated. 2009 was a very good year for me, with my 34<sup>th</sup> WSOP cash, putting me 37<sup>th</sup> on the all-time list, 11<sup>th</sup> final table (in the \$2.5K 2-7 Triple Draw), and an exciting run at the Main Event, culminating in a 34<sup>th</sup> place finish, worth \$253,941. As usual, at the end I was completely burned out. The WSOP has become a young-man's game.

The 2010 WSOP could have demarcated the end of the poker-explosion era, with the Black Friday indictments spelling the end of online poker in the U.S. at least for the foreseeable future, being served on April 15, 2011. The 2010 WSOP was a good, and nearly great, tournament for me, with five solid cashes and two final tables, where I was a key card or two away from a serious run at more gold. Main Event entries rose for the 3<sup>rd</sup> straight year to 7319, the second most in history, after dipping in 2007 after the passage of the UIGEA. Champion Jonathan Duhamel took home 8.9 million for his efforts.

Questions abound going into the 2011 WSOP concerning the ramifications of the indictments. Projected turnouts, especially for the ME, are a great unknown, but the final tally is sure to be significantly less than in 2010. Many internet players have money stuck online, and whether they'll recover them in time for the WSOP, or ever, for that matter, is questionable. Are there more indictments to be served, and will someone be taken into custody at the Rio? How will the media react, especially considering that most of the industry media was primarily sponsored by the sites?

Regardless of the specifics, the government's actions will surely have a damper on this year's tournament. I hope the poker world can recover from its setbacks, but right now poker is in a definite bear market.

In spite of the overall climate, the 2011 WSOP will again be the center of the poker universe for six exciting weeks. The WSOP has been a big part of my life. While I accept that the WSOP is forever altered, and concede that Harrahs is doing a much better job of handling the tournament than in their early years of tenure, I miss the old days at the Horseshoe. I was lucky enough to experience almost 20 years of the best it had to offer, something that, sadly, the new generation will never know. When new-school players hear complaints about the modern WSOP, they respond "Why play if it's so bad?" It's because, regardless of whose stewardship it's under, it's still the WSOP and nothing else comes close. I can't speak for others, but I'm as excited as ever, and can't wait to hit the felt!

## **Part II**

Let's take a look at everything you need to know about the WSOP, from soup to nuts:

## **The Players Card**

I put this first because having a Harrah's players card is a must. For one thing, you have to have one to enter any tournament, but it's also good for lots of other things, as I'll discuss. The higher your rating with the casino, the more perks you can get. If you don't have a card, the first thing you should do is get one, either at the booth in the casino or at a special desk near the poker area set up for that purpose. While you'll get points on your card for play in the casino, you don't get any for entering the tournament events or cash play.

## **Where to Stay**

In 2005, the first year the WSOP was at the Rio, for much of the tournament rooms at the hotel were priced sky high, in the \$300+-per-night range. However, with the many lodging options Las Vegas has to offer, management found that players weren't willing to pay those prices and in subsequent years rooms at the Rio during the WSOP have been much more available and affordable. If you're a good customer of Harrah's you might be able to get a room comped for part or all of your stay.

Players planning to stay in Vegas for much or all of the WSOP have taken to renting condos, apartments, or timeshares, both to save money and to have a more homey and comfortable environment to relax in. As many young players have discovered, getting a group together and renting a house provides an inexpensive\* and fun way to stay, with the added benefits of being able to discuss tournament developments and strategies with like-minded peers.

If you choose the house/roommate route, be sure you know your goals and those of your potential roomies. If your goal is to play hard every day and get as much rest as possible between sessions, a house full of parties won't work, and vice versa.

If you stay at the Rio, be aware that it's a pretty healthy walk from the hotel towers to the poker area. It's great to stay where you play and to have a place to lay your head down on dinner breaks, but on normal breaks, just getting to get to the room and back won't leave much time to spare.

The link below will bring you to Harrah's WSOP room reservation site:  
[wsop.com/reservations/](http://wsop.com/reservations/).

Players can make room reservations at the pre-entrant rates. Upon arrival in Las Vegas, they can provide their tournament receipt to the reservations desk and have the rates converted to the special WSOP entrant poker rates. Rio, Paris, Bally's, Harrah's, Flamingo, Caesars, Planet Hollywood, and Imperial Palace are all offering discounted rates for WSOP players.

\*Some well-heeled players have rented mansions for their stay. There are plenty to choose from in almost any price range.

## Getting to the Rio

Vegas has plenty of cabs available 24 hours a day throughout most of the city, which will drop you off at the WSOP entrance to the Rio. A less expensive option is a complimentary shuttle that leaves every 20 minutes from outside the Carnival World Buffet entrance. Hours are 10 a.m. to 1 a.m. and the route is Rio-Harrah's -- Bally's -- Rio.

If you fly in, renting a car is a viable option.

## **Parking**

The Rio has a huge parking lot in the back by the convention area where the WSOP is held. The easiest way to access it is from Twain Ave, which is between Spring Mountain and Flamingo. You can always find a spot, although you might be in for a bit of a walk to get to the poker areas. There's also a valet near the entrance, although it's sometimes designated full on the busiest days, like during the first week and at the beginning of the Main Event. However, remember you're in Vegas, where valet is never really full; if it's important to you, \$10-\$20 usually does the trick. (It's also a good place to see your favorite poker star arrive, if that's your thing.)

Once you get parked you have to find the entrance, which is near the valet and usually has a covered walkway and some poker-related stuff outside. Just follow the crowds walking in from the lot.

## **Parking-Lot Safety**

While parking-lot security has been beefed up the past couple of years, poker players with pockets full of cash are tempting targets, so be alert at all times. Common-sense precautions include being aware if anyone is following you, both walking to your car and while driving to where you stay. Be especially cautious if you're parked next to a van that could hide perpetrators.

## **The Poker Facilities**

In past years, the Rio's convention area had other events going on during the WSOP. Beginning in 2010 they've dedicated the entire convention facility to the WSOP, which is great news for players, as there are more tables little chance of getting shut out of events due to space limitations. (The layout worked well in 2010, and for 2011 little has been changed.)

Go through the doors to the convention center and the 58,000-square-foot Pavilion Ballroom is straight ahead. In 2010, in front of the entrance there was a cool display of WSOP bracelets from years past, including some belonging to Doyle Bronson, Johnny Chan, Phil Hellmuth, and Billy Baxter. Hopefully they'll have it again this year. Go through the doors to the Ballroom and you'll enter, as Amarillo Slim observed, "the biggest \*\*\*\*ing room I've ever seen!" It's hard to see to the other end, where a stage features a display of this year's bracelets awaiting their new owners. (Unfortunately,

access to the stage is blocked, so you can't see the bracelets close up.) If you turned right after entering building you'd be headed down a long hall toward the Amazon Room. On the left are other entrances to the Pavilion Room. On the right is the Miranda Room, housing the Gutshot Grill (which has replaced the Poker Kitchen) and the Brasilia

Room. In 2010 the Brasilia Room housed the Bad Beat Bar, but lack of business caused it to close about two weeks in, and a little bar station was added out in the main hall. At the end of the hall on the right, before you get to the Amazon Room, is the Will Call desk. It's also the place where you can obtain a players card and sign the release. A little further down on the right are the tournament cashiers.

The Pavilion Ballroom and 38,000-square-foot Amazon Room will house the all the poker action. The Amazon Room is the hub of the bracelet action, featuring the final table arena and the ESPN production area. The Pavilion Room hosts all cash games and satellite action, as well as some tournament play.

There's an area in the back outside the Amazon Room where tables and chairs are set up, as well as some nice portable bathrooms. It's a handy spot for Amazon Room players to take a bathroom break and smoke their item of choice. In 2009 one of the choices was illegal, but in 2010 management made it very clear that it wouldn't be tolerated.

One casualty of the new arrangement is the Poker Palooza, a gambling show that took place around the Main Event through 2009. It was a fun event and I'll miss it. There will be booths in the Brasilia Room and in the hallways with poker/gaming related vendors, and there should be some book signings and autograph sessions. Also, there will a series of free seminars where donations will be appreciated but not required:

***WSOP BAD BEAT ON CANCER SEMINAR SERIES SCHEDULE***

<b><u>DATE</u></b>	<b><u>TIME</u></b>	<b><u>NAME</u></b>	<b><u>TOPIC</u></b>	<b><u>LOCATION</u></b>
<i>Saturday, June 4</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Chad Brown</b>	Beating the Odds	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Saturday, June 11</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Andy Bloch</b>	No Limit Hold'em Pre-Flop Play	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Friday, June 17</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Doyle Brunson</b>	A Poker Life	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Saturday, June 18</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Phil Galfond</b>	Pot Limit Omaha	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Saturday, June 25</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Daniel Cates</b>	Playing Post-Flop	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Friday, July 1</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Vanessa Selbst</b>	No Limit Hold'em Tournament Strategy	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Saturday, July 2</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Phil Gordon</b>	Inquisitive Poker	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Thursday, July 7</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Annie Duke</b>	Making Better Decisions	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Friday, July 8</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Annette Obrestad</b>	Playing the Turn & River	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Saturday, July 9</i>	10:30 AM	<b>Sam Chauhan</b>	Main Event Mindset	Brasilia Main Stage
<i>Sunday, July</i>	10:30	<b>Phil Hellmuth</b>	11 Ways to Play	Brasilia Main

## THE MENU OF EVENTS

Many casual poker fans have the mistaken idea that the WSOP is just the Main Event (ME). This was true in the inaugural year of 1970, when there were no actual freeze-out events. Beginning the next year, preliminary events, most with less than the \$10K buy-in associated with the ME, gave players a chance to test their tournament skills in varied poker disciplines. Another popular misconception is that the preliminary events are part of a qualifying process for the ME. In fact, each prelim is a self-contained event with a separate prize pool and bracelet awarded, and all anybody needs to do to participate in the ME is fork over \$10,000.

As the WSOP has grown in popularity the number of bracelet events has increased. For example, including the ME, in 1974 there were six bracelet events, in 1997 there were 22, and in 2011 there will be 58. The time span of the WSOP has stretched from a couple of weeks in the '70s to over six weeks currently (or almost six months if you count the four-month break for the final table of the ME). The 2010 WSOP schedule can be found at: <http://www.wsop.com/tournaments/> On the page you'll see links to the structure sheet for each event and a pre-registration form.

Inflation and the strength of the modern poker economy has led to inclusion of a number of preliminary events with buy-ins of \$10K or higher. There are so-called "Championship Events" with buy-ins of \$10K, in Seven Stud, Stud 8-or-Better, No-Limit 2-7 Draw, Omaha 8-or-Better, Limit Hold 'em, Six-handed No-Limit Hold 'em, Pot-Limit Hold 'em, H.O.R.S.E., and Pot-Limit Omaha. In addition there's a \$25K Heads Up No Limit Hold 'em event, and the \$50K Poker Player's Championship.

Prior to the No-Limit Hold 'em explosion of 2003, the menu of events at the WSOP varied among many different poker games. This made sense because prior to 2003 No-Limit Hold'em (NLH) cash games were a rarity with everyday professionals. For example, in 1997, out of twenty-two bracelet events, only three were NLH, including the ME. Compare that to 2011, where 26 of the 58 events are NLH, and you can plainly see NLH's domination over the modern poker scene. Also, several different NLH disciplines are offered:

\* Eighteen events of the standard tournament structure (discussed below), including a casino employee's (must have casino employee ID card), senior's (age 50 and above), and ladies' events. Since 1989, other than the casino employee's, senior's and ladies' events, no buy-ins were lower than \$1,500. In 2009 they experimented with an open, \$1K buy-in NLH event on the first Saturday of the tournament and more than 6,000 players flooded into the Rio to fill every available seat, with many turned away. The success of this event led to the decision to offer a series of six \$1K events in 2010, and in 2011 there

will be five. The open \$1K events will require four days of play to determine the bracelet winner. The ME has four Day 1 sessions.

\* Five six-handed events. These have the same structure as the standard events, except tables contain no more than six players. Six-handed tables became popular on internet poker sites as players took to the increased action and aggression. Often in these events you'll spend some time playing four- or five-handed, especially at the start as late-registering players filter in. The action is fast and players bust quickly, so be sure this is your cup of tea before entering.

\* Two shootouts. One of my favorite structures, this is very similar to a sit-n-go or one-table satellite. A player must beat everyone at the table he starts at in order to advance. Once the first round is over at all tables, new tables are drawn and the process starts again the next day. It usually takes 2-3 rounds to reach the final table. Players who win their first table will receive prize money. These events are limited to 2,000 players, so enter early if you want to play. There's also a Limit Hold'em shootout.

\* One heads-up event. Players are randomly paired off in a single-elimination format until the final match, which is two out of three. This is a prestigious, \$25K-buy-in event, so the field usually consists of very good players. It's limited to 256 players and it should be interesting to see if it sells out in the current poker climate.

The remainder of the events are a nice mix of what I'm unfortunately compelled, in the modern poker climate, to refer to as "the off games." Limit Hold'em, Limit and Pot-Limit Omaha 8-or-Better, 7-Stud, 7-Stud 8-or-Better, Pot-Limit Omaha, Limit 2-7 Triple Draw, No-Limit 2-7 Lowball, and Razz are represented, as well as several tournaments consisting of a mixture of games, including a \$50K buy-in mixture of eight games called the Poker Players Championship. Many players were upset last year when the Player's Championship was the big kickoff event, as it limited the field to sponsored players or the highest of rollers. Lots of players, me included, would like a chance to work their way into this event, and management complied, moving it to just before the ME. The winner of this prestigious event will receive the Chip Reese memorial trophy.

There are also numerous non-bracelet events with buy-ins ranging from \$135 to \$235 nearly every day of the WSOP beginning on May 30.

The relegation of the “off-game” tournaments to second-tier status after the NLH explosion upset lots of veteran players. The way the schedule was set, “off-game” aficionados usually had to choose between their game of choice and the juicy NLH events, because while often more than one tournament was contested each day, they started at about the same time.

In 2007 a welcome innovation was instituted where, on days with multiple events, the first started at noon and the second at 5 p.m. This gave players a choice of playing the noon event and if eliminated, to play the later event. And they could even enter up until an hour after the 5 p.m. start, although they were penalized some chips for missed blinds and antes. While the “off-game” events were generally relegated to the 5 p.m. start time, at least it was an improvement that gave veteran players a chance to play more events in their preferred games. Some issues needed to be worked out, however. For one thing, the ante and blind structure of the limit events was so low in relation to the starting chip stacks that it was unusual for a player to be eliminated before midnight. Since the late events usually played until 3 a.m. and a large percentage of the field survived, it made for lots of very long and tiring days, as well as reducing the fields in the noon events. Also, 2007 was the year of the ill-fated tent experiment\* and many of the “off-game” events were relegated to the tent.

\*(A large tent was erected outside the back doors near the Amazon Room to house more tables. Players hated the tent. For one thing the temperature was almost impossible to regulate in the hot Vegas summer. I remember one night it was so cold in the tent I had to go outside between hands to warm up. The final straw came during a fierce windstorm when the tent nearly blew down and players feared for their safety. The following year the tent was used for the Poker Kitchen and additional ballrooms in the convention center were used for poker. It is now an ESPN production facility.)

In 2008 the multiple-event situation saw some improvements. Under the advice of the Player’s Advisory Committee, the structure of some of the limit events was tweaked, with faster play in the early stages. While no one wants to get eliminated, an early exit allowed more time to recuperate before the next-day’s events. Also, players could enter up to two hours late, although still incurring deductions from their starting stacks. In 2009, a major innovation was that players could enter up to two hours after the starting time without penalty. This was well received for a number of reasons:

-Players now had a full seven-hour window after the start of the noon events to enter without being docked part of their stack.

-Players who felt that the early stages of tournaments were relatively inconsequential could use that time for other things, like getting some rest. (Phil Hellmuth is the poster boy for this tactic, rarely being at the table for the start of an event.)

-Players who play multiple events at the same time had more latitude. While attempting to play more than one event at a time may seem strange, a surprising number of big-name players do it. Why? For one thing, the rewards for winning bracelets can go far beyond the prize money in terms of endorsements, etc. For another, bracelet bets among top players for very large sums are commonplace. In 2009, Phil Ivey’s multiple-bracelet performance was worth far more (rumored to be in the multi-million range) than the prize money he received for his victories.

As an example of multi-eventing, Jeff Lisandro drew the seat to my right in the start of the \$10K Stud 8-or-Better, came to the table and told us we were in luck because he was deep in the \$5K Pot-Limit Omaha event, which was running simultaneously, and he wouldn't be at our table much, thereby donating his antes. Unfortunately (for us), he busted out of the PLO quickly and came back to the table full-time, winning just about every hand he played and eventually capturing his second bracelet of the year. (Incredibly, he got his third a few days later, propelling him to the Player of the Year title.) It will be interesting to see how many multi-eventers there will be this year with the sponsoring sites in crisis.

In 2010 the late registration procedure changed a bit. If a player entered late and there were no open seats at active tables, he had to wait until the start of the next level to play. Usually he was put at a table with players who signed up near the same time he did. The late-forming tables will be the first to break. You had until the end of the first break to enter.

In 2011 the policy has been changed again allowing players in any event to enter up until the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> level! This is great news for money eventers and those like for me whom energy conservation is key.

Another change in 2009 was the elimination of re-buy events. I had mixed feelings about this. While I've had good success in re-buy events, there's simply too much luck involved in the starting table draw, a vital aspect in getting off to a good start. Players unfortunate enough to draw dead starting tables (where there are few re-buys) were at a big disadvantage. Also, the criticism that well-heeled players were attempting to "buy a bracelet" by going on re-buy binges held some merit. But mostly, I'm glad they're gone because they were so slow. The extended breaks necessary for floor people to verify the re-buy money were interminable for players and hard on the floor people. In the last WSOP re-buy event I played, the two hours of re-buy-period play were matched by about two hours in breaks. In homage to the re-buy events, this year there are two "triple-chance" NLH events, where players are given two free "reloads" at any time during the first four levels.

Also discontinued the past two years was the alternate system, where, in sold out events, a waiting list was taken and seats of busted players were filled from the list. I think it was just too much extra work for the already-overburdened staff.

A welcome change started in 2010 is the firm policy that all tourneys starting at noon will have a maximum of 10 one-hour levels and are expected to wrap up 12:45 a.m. each night. All tourneys that start at 5 p.m. will have a maximum of eight one-hour levels. Another change in response to player's desires is the elimination of the dinner break, replaced by a 30 minute break, in the late events. This means that a player wanting to play a 5:00 event could come in at 9:45 to enter and be done by 2:00am. This is a great innovation!

## **Event Structures**

The structure of an event refers to the length of time of the levels, the size of players' starting stacks, and the starting point and progression of the blinds and antes. A key to how fast an event moves along is the size of the blinds and antes in relation to the starting stack.

Event structures are a constant issue among players. Events must come to completion within a set time frame, three days in most WSOP prelims. If an event is too slow at the beginning (blinds and antes are low in relation to stacks), it must be accelerated in later

stages. Most professional players, me included, would like to see a faster structure at the beginning and more play in the mid and late-stages. I want to either get a hold of some serious chips to make a real run at the cash or get knocked out early and play another event. The other side of the argument is that casual players would like to last longer in their chosen event in order to extend their WSOP experience. A fast structure and likely quick exit don't meet with their goals. It's a tricky situation and management is in a constant struggle to appease everyone.

In the old days the starting chip stack was directly correlated to the buy-in. In other words, in a \$2K event players started with \$2K in chips. Many players felt that in some events, especially the lower buy-in NLH events, the structure was simply too fast at the start. One solution was to lower the starting blinds, but that entailed putting \$5 chips in play, which resulted in an extra, time-consuming process of taking them out of play. The solution management came up with was to give players double starting stacks, i.e. in a \$2K event, players started with 4000 in chips. In 2009, they decided to give players triple chips, so the \$2K participant started with 6000. This extends right through the ME, where players begin the battle with 30,000 in chips.

While deep-stack tournaments are the rage today and many players like the concept of more play at the start of an event, I don't think it's a one-solution-fits-all situation. Even with a slightly faster structure in the beginning, the triple chips feature has made many of the limit events interminable and, as opposed to the no-limit events, the beginning levels are essentially meaningless, in my opinion. While the late-entry option is a help to multi-event players attempting to conserve valuable energy, a better solution might be to go back to double or even single-correlated stack-to-buy-ins in the limit events to propel them more quickly to the point where every hand really matters, and then the structure could slow down.

An issue I have strong feelings about is the subject of 9 vs. 10-handed tables in flop-game (Hold 'em and Omaha) events. I'm very much against playing ten-handed. For one thing, the comfort factor is very important during the long grind of the WSOP and ten-handed tables are crowded and uncomfortable. More importantly, the fewer players at a table, the better the poker and faster the event moves. With ten players at a table it's more likely that someone is going to have a big hand, so it becomes more of a waiting game. As the number of players decreases, more aggressive play is called for and the overall level of play and the skill factor are heightened. This is why the 6-handed events are a favorite among the new generation of players.

I think management was of the opinion that utilizing ten-handed tables would cut costs, but I think it was faulty thinking because the fewer the players the faster the play and the more quickly players are eliminated. This is obvious from observing the 6-handed events, where the field shrinks rapidly.

In 2005 and 2006 management was insistent on starting events ten-handed, even the ME. Things began to improve in this area in 2007, and last year I was happy to see that 9-

handed was the order of the day unless extreme space considerations forced them to do otherwise.

## **REGISTERING FOR EVENTS**

### **Pre-Registration**

Players can pre-register for any of the WSOP events up until two weeks prior to the start of that particular event. For more info, go to [wsop.com/registration](http://wsop.com/registration).

You must send a cashier's check or wire the full amount of the entry fee for whatever tournament or tournaments you wish to pre-register. Credit cards aren't accepted for any tournament entry.

Once you get to the Rio, go to the WSOP Will Call, show them your ID and Total Rewards card, and get your receipt and table assignment. You can cancel your entry and get a refund anytime before the start of the event by filling out a cancellation form and bringing it to the WSOP office or by email, as long as you do it in enough time so it can be approved by management.

Should you face an emergency and aren't able to cancel your entry, there a provision in the rules. From the WSOP rulebook:

Any player who has not taken a hand by the start of the third level will be considered a "no show." These players will have their chips removed from play and will not be eligible to participate in that event. The buy-ins for "no shows" will be removed from the prize pool and placed on safekeeping in that player's name at the Main WSOP Registration cage after the second level of play. All funds placed on safekeeping due to no shows must be claimed prior to July 19th, 2011. Funds not claimed on or before that date shall be forfeited to Rio and shall not be refunded for any reason whatsoever.

Is pre-registering really necessary? Not really, except possibly for the most popular events, like the \$1K NLHs and the ME, especially if you're particular about your starting day. You're not allowed to have someone else register for you in any event and entries aren't transferable. The minimum age to be able to participate in any event is 21.

For 2011, the WSOP cashier's cage opens May 30 at 9 a.m. Prior to that, players can enter bracelet events at the Rio's main cage.

If you want to wire money to the cage at the Rio in lieu of carrying cash as you travel, instructions can be found here:

<http://www.wsop.com/2011/2011-WSOP-Wire-Payment-Instructions.pdf>

### **Registering at the Rio**

The first couple of years the WSOP was at the Rio the tournament-cage operation left much to be desired. Since then it's been greatly improved. There's a dedicated cage for tournament entries and payouts, and another for cash games. The tournament cage has a

VIP side for customers with Harrah's Diamond level and above Total Rewards cards. Usually, it's not a big deal, as there are plenty of cashiers and lines move quickly on both sides.

You can enter any and as many events as you want at one time, so if you know what events you want to play and don't want to carry the cash around, it's a good idea to enter up front. If you can't play an event for any reason, as long as you come back before the event starts, they'll refund your entry fee with no problems. To enter you must be 21, be able to prove it, and present a Total Rewards card.

You must also sign a player release, a marvel of legalese, in which you essentially sign away all rights to anything to do with the WSOP. Be aware that if you have cash transactions of more than \$10,000 in a 24-hour period, you could be asked for information for a Cash Transaction Report (CTR) that goes to the U.S. government. (This won't affect you if you pay the \$10,000 for the ME in cash, as it's not over \$10k.) It's is nothing to be concerned about for most people. I've filled out countless CTRs during my career.

### **Registration and Online-Poker Sites**

Prior to the passage of the Unlawful Internet Gaming Enforcement Act in fall 2006, online-poker sites were permitted to register satellite winners directly into the applicable events at the WSOP. Since the bill's passage, the Rio will not accept such entries.

### **Getting Paid**

In the good ol' days, if you got in the money, you were simply handed cash. Unfortunately, that's no longer the case. Players who cash must go through an intensive paperwork process. You must provide identification and your Social Security number. If you profit more than \$5,000, you'll be issued a form W-2G for the amount you cashed, less the buy-in. The IRS gets a copy, so act accordingly. Keep your entry receipts and good records of any other gambling losses, and get a good accountant. If you don't provide a SS#, you'll be subject to 28% withholding. You can elect to be paid in cash, casino chips, or by check, or leave the money at the cage until you depart the Rio for the year.

At times the cashout process can be very time-consuming, such as after the bubble bursts in a large event and the cage quickly gets crowded. If you need to get paid immediately, you must endure the wait. If you can wait, simply keep the ticket they give you when you're eliminated and come back when it's not so busy. The cage is open 24 hours. When you're giving your information during the cash out process, you'll be asked if you wish to leave a tip for the dealers and staff. This is strictly voluntary. Be aware that a percentage is deducted from every tournament prize pool for this purpose. (see "tipping" in future excerpt)

If you're a non-resident of the U.S. there are further issues. If you're from a tax-treaty country (if you are, you'll probably know the tax ramifications for you of winning money abroad, but the WSOP has a list of the treaty countries in case you need it), you'll need an Individual Tax Identification Number. The staff at the cage can help you with this. If you don't get this number, your prize will be subject to 30% withholding. Similarly, if you're from a non-U.S. tax-treaty country, your prize will be subject to 30% withholding, but this is beyond our scope here; definitely get professional help or be prepared to loan the United States government 30% of your winnings until you can get it back.

## **TOURNAMENT PROCEDURES**

## **Table Draw**

In the early days of the WSOP, tournaments routinely started up to an hour or more late, as there was no late sign-up provision and management wanted as many entries as possible. Today, tournaments start very close to the scheduled time, but the late-entry option often means that tables are less than full at the start. In 2009, there was a policy of keeping open seats at most tables throughout the late-entry period.

There's a lot of luck involved in poker tournaments. One factor that's sometimes overlooked is the importance of your starting table and seat assignment. Naturally, you'd prefer to be at a table with unskilled players. Also, most players like to be at a table that doesn't break for as long as possible, because it's easier to adjust to one new player coming to your table than it is to adjust to an entire table when you're moved. In the days before computerization was the norm, table and seat assignments were done by hand by casino personnel and some ethically challenged players found ways to gaff the system, getting assigned to one of the last tables to break. Fortunately, the modern system of randomly generated seat assignments has solved this issue. When you pay, you'll get three postcard-sized pieces of paper. Two are identical, with the name, date, and time of the event, and your room, table, and seat assignment. One goes to the dealer when you sit down and the other is your receipt. (The dealer will also ask to see your ID.) Always save your receipts for tax purposes. The third paper is your food comp, which is good at the Gut Shot Grill and most of the Rio's restaurants. In past years, the value of the comp was \$10 for most events.

## **Breaking Tables**

In standard-format events as players are eliminated, tables are condensed. The mechanics of this are as follows:

Once the event begins, floor people determine a breaking order of the tables. The breaking order scrolls along the bottom of the tournament clock. When a player is eliminated, the dealer puts out a seat card corresponding to that seat, which is picked up by a floor person. When there are enough empty seats to break a table, a floor person will come to the next table to break and ask the dealer to deal one playing card to each player, and then the floor person will distribute the seat cards in clockwise order starting with the player dealt the highest card. The players then bring their chips and the seat card to their respective new tables, give the seat card to the dealer, and sit down to play. If it's a stud-type event, the new player is dealt in the next hand. If it's a flop-game event, the new player assumes the rights and responsibilities of the seat he takes. The only time a new player can't get a hand is if he's between the small blind and the button. In that case he waits one hand and is dealt in behind the button. The dealer will handle this situation. Tables are condensed in this fashion until it comes to the point to re-draw, deep in the event. Here's the balancing and re-draw procedure (from the wsop.com website):

When the Tournament reaches 12 tables, the remaining tables will be balanced within 1 player until the final table is reached. There will be a re-draw for seat assignments when

play reaches 3 tables, again at 2 tables, and for the final table seat assignments for events that have 100 or more participants. For events with less than 100 participants but more than 50, there will be a re-draw at 2 tables and again for final table seat assignments.

The above procedure sounds simple enough, but there are some glitches to be aware of:

- Astute tournament players pay close attention to the breaking order and often adjust their play accordingly. For example, if you're at a table with good players and your table is due to break soon, you might want to tighten up and wait for a better table before getting frisky. However, if your table won't break for a long time, you'll need to establish a presence or you could get run over.

The first few years at the Rio there was rarely a posted breaking order and floor people seemed to break tables willy-nilly. Oftentimes ESPN producers would tell the floor people which tables to break for TV purposes. This was a prime example of outside factors affecting the play of an event.

Let's say you're at a table with talented big-name players. The table is the next logical one to break and you'll be happy to get to an easier table. Then the TV producers decide your table is great television and tell the floor to leave it intact instead of breaking it when it's supposed to. Good for TV, bad for you.

Many players, myself among them, were vocal about the need for a posted breaking order. In the past few years, management has obliged and the order is now posted on the clock. However, it's not set in stone and there have been occasions when the order is changed for whatever reason. This is unacceptable. Other than the playing-strategy issue mentioned above, the main reason for doing things a set way is to avoid the *possibility of impropriety*.

I think the above issues have been discussed in-depth by management and the PAC. The rules posted on the wsop.com website for the 2011 WSOP are explicit in laying out the procedure for breaking tables. I trust there won't be problems in this area going forward.

- Experienced players know the frustration of having their table break right after they took the blind, or blinds, only to go to a new table and walk right into the blind again. Early in an event, this is generally more frustrating than damaging, but at the later stages, one blind can be very significant.

One issue I've never seen addressed, even by the Tournament Director's Association (TDA), is whether the next hand should be dealt before breaking the table if the dealer has begun shuffling. Some floor people let the next hand be dealt at that table; others use that shuffle for the high-card deal to distribute the seats cards. There should be uniformity.

- Some players take a leisurely detour in order to avoid a blind if they see that they're due for a blind at their new table. There's a penalty for this, as there should be, and I've actually seen it enforced once.

- The physical move to a new table can sometimes be tricky, with players having to tote along all their paraphernalia, such as drinks, pillows, Ipods, etc., along with their chips and seat card. A rule was put into place a few years back that prohibits players from carrying chips in their pockets. The penalty is confiscation of the chips. The reasoning behind this rule is to prevent unscrupulous players from taking chips out of play, to be used later or passed to a confederate. The problem is that the only times I've seen this rule employed have been to punish an uninformed novice player. True cheaters would never pull chips out of their pockets in plain view. A few years back, a first-time player in the ME made the mistake of putting his chips in his pocket when he moved tables. He immediately pulled them out when he got to his new table. The floor was called and his chips were taken and he was disqualified. What a horrible ruling! It was obvious he wasn't doing anything underhanded, but he received an extreme penalty. Does anybody think his telling of his first, and probably last, WSOP experience will help grow the event? The penalty should be restricted to intentionally taking chips out of play for sinister purposes.

### **Balancing Tables**

Players aren't eliminated uniformly and sometimes a table will be short players while there still aren't enough empty seats to break a table. If there are more than twelve tables left in the event, balancing will be done when a table is three players short. With twelve tables or less, balancing will be done when a table is two players short. In those cases, play will be halted and the procedure is to take a player from a full table starting from the next table in the breaking order. If that table isn't full, it goes to the next in the breaking order, and so on. The player at the full table who's due for the big blind is moved to the worst seating position relative to the big blind.

### **Chipping Up**

As the blinds and antes escalate in a tournament, lower-denomination chips become superfluous and are taken out of play, usually with higher-denomination chips being introduced. This is done at the end of a level, usually when the smaller chips are no longer needed for making correct antes and blinds.

The usual procedure is for a floor person to come by a few minutes before the chip-up, put some empty chip racks on the table, and ask for one player to buy up the chips to be taken out. If you're one of the big stacks at the table, you can volunteer, but you don't have to. Sometimes players start pushing their stacks at you. Again, it's voluntary, so help out if you aren't uncomfortable doing so. There will be a race-off for odd chips, meaning chips that are left over after stacking the smaller denomination in groups to be converted to the next highest denomination chip. For example, if they're taking off the \$25 chips and you have \$550 in \$25's, stack up \$500 and push it to the chip buyer. Keep the two odd chips. Once everybody sells their chips to the buyer, the race will happen. The dealer will shuffle and give one card per odd chip, starting to his left, to each player who has odd chips. The total number of odd chips determines how many players get a higher denomination chip. Continuing the example, if there are eighteen odd \$25 chips, five

\$100 chips will be distributed. If the breakage is half or more of the higher denomination, it's rounded up. If there had been \$425 in odd chips, only four \$100 chips would be awarded. The \$100 chips are distributed according to the highest card dealt to each player, and each player can only win one. A player cannot be raced out of a tournament. If a player has only the chips for the race and he loses, he'll be given one chip of the smallest denomination still in play.

Chipping up can take 15-20 minutes, especially at the early levels. In 2006 there was something of a scandal when an extra \$2 million in chips appeared in the ME. No one's really sure where they came from, but the consensus is that they came from a mistake during a chipping-up episode. Since then management has been extra careful, so it can be a long process.

Generally the chip-up will be done before players are sent on break and the time required doesn't eat into break time. If you don't have any odd chips and aren't the one buying, take a long break. If you're the one buying, be sure you don't have any odd chips before they start the race. Odd chips discovered after the race are forfeited. In 2009, my table was broken right before the chip-up and instead of doing it at that table, the floor person sent us to our new tables. By the time I got to mine, they had already raced-off, so I had to forfeit my odd chips. Sometimes the race-off won't coincide with a break. Tis can be a good time to grab an extra bathroom break.

Be sure you know when to come back from break, as they might not announce the length of the break until the chips are taken off all the tables. At that point, they'll set the tournament clock with the time left on break. If you have odd chips, it's not necessary to wait for the race. Some players like to witness the race, others put more value on the added break time. If you leave the table, the dealer will take care of your chips for you. Occasionally, late in an event, there will be a chip-up at the end of a level where a scheduled break isn't called for. This can be a good time to grab an extra bathroom or smoke break. Sometimes they'll announce a five or ten-minute break. If not, understand that they'll be dealing as soon as they're ready and won't wait for you.

### **The End of the Day's Play**

Play on Day 1 of the noon events should end around 1 a.m., the late events around 2 a.m. Rather than end the day's play according to the clock, ten minutes before the end of play a random procedure is used to determine the number of additional hands to be played. Playing cards 3-7 will be used and a random player will be asked to pick one of the cards. The reason for this in flop games is to prevent players from trying to manipulate the button as the clock winds down in order to end the night in the most advantageous position as possible. I'm not sure why they do it in stud-type games.

The noon events should resume at 2:30 p.m. the next day. In 2009 the restarts were scheduled for 2 p.m., but this conflicted with the bracelet ceremony, making things awkward as players were sometimes involved in hands as national anthems were being played. The late events should resume at 3 p.m.

Most events will conclude on Day 3. The \$1k's will finish on Day 4 and the ME not until Day 9, which is the final table in November. These times are subject to change, so be sure to verify your re-start time before you leave for the night.

## **Bagging Up**

If you're lucky enough to make it through a Day 1 of an event, you'll "bag your chips" at the end of the night. It's a simple procedure:

A floor person comes by as the time nears and puts some fairly large plastic bags, pens and three-copy 4x6 cards in the dealer's box. Once play is over, the dealer puts the bags, pens, and cards in the center of the table and players take one of each. On the card you write your name, hometown, chip count, and table/seat assignment for the following day. Put the white copy of the card in the bag, give the yellow to the dealer, and keep the pink for the next day, when the dealer may or may not ask for it. (The dealer *will* ask for ID unless you're known to him.) Then you put your chips in the bag and seal it. Sealing the bag can be a bit tricky. There's a reddish strip on the flap covering a sticky strip. Pull this off, fold the flap over, and it should seal. I like to turn the bag over and shake it a bit to make sure no chips can get out. If you make a mistake, such as not putting the white copy in or not sealing it properly, tell the dealer you need a floor person, who will come over give you another bag, which he'll probably tell you to put the original bag into once you've corrected the problem and after you've written your info on the new bag. If you're fortunate enough to have so many chips that they won't fit in one bag, they'll use two, but the bags hold a lot of chips and I think I've only seen this once or twice. The same bagging procedure is used at the end of each day's play.

*I'll repeat this warning: Before you leave the building, make sure you verify what time to return the next day. It's also a good idea to check online in the morning on the [wsop.com](http://wsop.com) website.*

## **The Bubble**

Approximately 10% of each tournament field gets paid, so it gets a little tense when it gets close to "the bubble," the point where the prize money begins. Every tournament has a "bubble boy," the player who is eliminated one out of the money. Bubble time is a very important phase of every tournament. Players with big stacks want to play a lot of hands and accumulate chips from players struggling to hold on. The small stacks want to play as few hands as possible to avoid the chance of elimination.

In order to avoid short stacks stalling or playing very slowly, a rule was implemented a few years back that play becomes "hand-for-hand" when it gets down to one player away from the money, meaning every table has to finish a hand before the next one is dealt. This goes on until a player is ko'd and everyone else is in the money. Of course, when the bubble is two or more players away, it doesn't stop stalling, and it sometimes causes problems. A clock may be called on a player abusing his time allotment for acting on his hand. In the ME, hand-for-hand is started when five players are away from the money and can take a long time. Usually some time is put back on the clock so not too much of a level is eaten up by the hand-for-hand.

## **The Tournament Clock**

The development of the tournament clock back in the '80s was a welcome addition for players. It used to be that the Tournament Director (TD) would keep the time and if a player wanted to know how much time was left in a level, he needed to find the TD and ask.

Along with the time left in a level, the clock shows the number of players entering the event, the prize-money breakdown, the blinds and antes of the current and next level, and the number of players remaining (although it's often not up-to-the-minute). This important information should be easily visible to all players, but that isn't always the case. The WSOP is literally a three-ring circus and more. Often, five or more events run simultaneously and there aren't enough clocks to go around. Also, a lot of the LCD screens hanging from the ceiling that might be put to great use as clocks are used for other things. At the final table of the 2-7 Triple-Draw in 2009, we didn't have a clock anywhere, so we were back to asking a floor person. This is unacceptable and a greater effort should be made to provide more clocks.

## **Breaks**

You get a break from play, at the minimum, every two hours. Regular breaks are supposed to be twenty minutes, but occasionally they'll be extended. Dinner breaks for the noon events are ninety minutes. The 5 p.m. events have a thirty-minute break at the end of level 4.

Over the past couple of years, the problem of congestion at the bathrooms has been greatly relieved by the installation of temporary bathrooms in the back, outside the Amazon Room. Bathrooms are located throughout the halls of the convention area and up the long hall toward the casino.

Since there's no smoking allowed anywhere inside the convention area, smokers must do their thing up front by the entrance or out in the back, which is a very popular spot for smokers.

Players can grab a snack in the Gutshot Grill, this year located in the Miranda Room. There's a nice selection of salads, sandwiches, Chinese food, hamburgers, wraps, pizza, etc. For dinner, the Rio has some good restaurants. Be careful about overeating on breaks. Jack Strauss used to love seeing the outrageous player's buffet at the Horseshoe, because he knew undisciplined players would stuff themselves and come back to play lethargic and groggy. In tournaments, it usually just takes one mistake to end your day, especially after dinner when the stakes are higher.

If you have a room at the Rio, it's generally too far to go on a short break, but not out of the question if you walk quickly. On 30-minute or dinner breaks, it's nice to have a place to lay your head down for a bit to recuperate.

On very busy days, such as the \$1K open NLH events, you might want to consider leaving a minute or two early to beat the rush, especially for dinner breaks, as the

restaurants can get very crowded. Whether it's worth missing a hand or two is for you to decide. If you're a Diamond card holder, the concierge should be able to help with dinner reservations.

When you go on a break, you must leave your chips on the table. To take them with you can result in forfeiture or disqualification. I recommend putting your biggest chips at the bottom of a stack and finding a way to safeguard them all as best you can. I sometimes wrap the cord from the headphones to my Ipod around my stacks. While dealers remain at the tables on breaks, there have been incidents in the past where chips have disappeared.

The biggest downtime of all is when approaching the bubble at the ME. In 2009, there were more than seventy tables in action when they started playing hand-for-hand and it took thirteen hands and almost two hours for the bubble to burst. In between hands, there was plenty of time to go to the bathroom or grab a smoke.

### **Getting Rubbed the Right Way**

Tournament poker is a stressful and physically taxing undertaking, and neck and back muscles tend to tighten up. In light of that, masseuses have become an integral part of the modern poker scene. The WSOP features an army of masseuses prowling the tournament floor looking for customers, a lot of them good-looking women. The way they move around trying to make eye-contact kind of reminds me of a strip club. Some players have personal masseuses. Others make good use of the on-site masseuses, seeming to never be without one. Personally, I can't focus and never seem to win during a massage at the table. In 2009, Rio's masseuses charged \$2/minute, plus tip. While I don't like massages at the table, occasionally I'll make use of the extended dinner break to get a neck and shoulder massage out on the hall at the massage station or at an empty table. It does much to rejuvenate a tired poker player.

## **WSOP PERSONNEL**

### **Top Management**

There's a question in my mind as to the actual level of awareness and involvement concerning the WSOP of the top level of Harrah's corporate management. Harrah's is a huge corporation and, even though the WSOP has proved to be a solid revenue producer, it's still a pretty small piece of the corporate pie. I was on a radio show, in 2006, I believe, with Howard Greenbaum, who was brought over from the corporate side to run the WSOP. His attitude on the show was very upbeat and when I told him that many players were upset with the conditions, he seemed genuinely surprised. Perhaps this led to the hiring of Jeffrey Pollack and the formation of the Players Advisory Council (PAC).

Unfortunately, Jeffrey Pollack left his position after the 2009 tournament. I'm not sure what his reasons were for leaving, but in many ways he will be missed. (A clue is that he is running the recently announced Federated Sports+Gaming League.) Pollack did much to bring the WSOP into the mainstream, and the tremendous growth in popularity of the WSOP owes much to his efforts. Among his innovations were the PAC, the November Nine concept, the WSOP London, and securing a long-term deal with ESPN.

I think his most important role, however, was as a liaison between WSOP participants and Harrah's top executives. When he arrived in 2005, the WSOP had just been removed from the bosom of the Binion clan and players were confronted with the realities of corporate America and the profits-above-all-else mentality. Players felt exploited and abused, not without good reason. Pollack skillfully walked the tight rope between the corporation and the players and, while there are still points of contention, I think most players felt that under Pollack's reign, Harrah's tried to better conditions. Pollack's resignation and Harrah's choice not to hire a replacement leave players apprehensive about who will be looking out for their interests going forward.

### **Ty Stewart**

With Jeffrey Polack gone, the closest thing to his former position is WSOP Executive Director Ty Stewart, who left a position with the NFL in 2005 to come to Harrahs. Stewart is now the spokesperson for the WSOP and is very active behind the scenes.

### **Jack Effel**

Tournament Director Jack Effel has enjoyed a rapid ascent through the ranks of Harrah's poker hierarchy, rising to co-WSOP Tournament Director along with Robert Daily in 2006, then taking over the position on his own with Daily's resignation just before the 2007 WSOP. While I felt he was too young and inexperienced to handle the job his first couple of years, I think he has grown into the position and did a fine job the past few years. With Jeffrey Pollack's departure, the onus of keeping players happy in the face of pressure from corporate management to increase profitability will add to his already considerable work load.

## **The Players Advisory Council**

Under the tutelage of Jeffrey Pollack, the PAC was formed in 2006 WSOP as a vehicle for player representatives to interact with management in order to air player concerns and recommendations.

After the 2007 WSOP I was contacted by Pollack's secretary and told that he wanted to meet with me about possible inclusion on the PAC. I've always been outspoken on player's rights and WSOP matters, so I thought I could be a valuable addition. Strangely, I was never contacted again and didn't get the opportunity to participate. Regardless, the PAC got along nicely without me and I think many of the improvements in recent years have been a direct result of the PAC's efforts. Among the issues that have been addressed by the PAC are the event schedule, structure and payout schedules, the development of the November Nine concept, efforts toward nine-handed tables, and various rules issues. Hopefully, despite Jeffrey Pollack's resignation, the PAC will continue to be a real voice for players.

## **Front-Line Employees**

The WSOP is a huge operation that requires a large staff, many of whom are hired from outside the company. It would be unfair to expect that every employee be top of the line in quality, attitude, and dedication. Also, as much of a grind that the six weeks are for players, I think we sometimes forget that it's that and more for often-overworked employees. As the tournament grinds on, tempers can get short, so everyone should do their best to maintain their cool and make it as enjoyable as possible for everyone.

## **Floor People**

Floor people are the frontline management in charge of conducting the events. Their job is to keep things running smoothly, handling such mechanical operations as organizing the dealers, keeping the tournament clock up-to-date, announcing level changes, conducting chip-ups, breaking tables, and overseeing the nightly bagging procedure. That's the easy part.

Floor people are also responsible for the difficult job of making rulings, handling disputes, and assessing penalties. While poker rules have evolved greatly over the years, in many instances specific rulings aren't covered in the rule books or are subject to interpretation by the floor person.

The WSOP employs a large number of floor people, with varying levels of competence and dedication. Some enjoy their job, know the rule books by heart, work tirelessly, and are 100% impartial. Most deviate from perfection in some or all of those categories. It doesn't make them bad people, just human. If you're on the receiving end of what you feel is a bad ruling or decision, you can ask for a second opinion, but usually play will go on and if the decision was found to be in error, it will be corrected if possible. If not, you'll have to live with it.

Floor people have a very tough job and are often caught in the middle of disputes, but they're not the enemy. Befriend them if possible and everyone will have a more enjoyable experience.

## **Dealers**

In the early days of the WSOP, a relatively small group of dealers regularly worked the tournament. They were part of the "WSOP family" and usually made a nice score, especially for the ME. Alas, those days are long gone.

Today, WSOP management has the challenge of rounding up more than 700 dealers to handle all the poker offerings at the WSOP. Among them is a segment of dealers who don't hold full-time dealing jobs, preferring to travel the tournament circuit. Most of these are competent, experienced dealers who like the freedom of being able to choose where and when they work.

Some dealers are able to get the time off from their regular dealing jobs to work the WSOP. Others work the WSOP in addition to their regular jobs. (You can usually tell them by the look of utter exhaustion as the WSOP progresses.) To fill out the roster, a significant number of fairly inexperienced dealers must be employed.

The best dealers know the rules and procedures, are adept at handling chips and cards, seamlessly do calculations and keep track of side pots, and possess good people skills. Naturally, there's a variation in ability and attitude. Overall, given the situation, I've been satisfied with the dealing corps, but the truth is that compared to the early days, the overall quality of dealing has declined at the WSOP.

There are two factors that attract quality dealers to any job: working conditions and, most importantly, money. I think the beginning of the decline occurred when Becky Behnen started dipping into the dealers' tip pool to pay her other employees. This caused a precipitous decline in dealer revenue and caused a lot of hard feelings. Some dealers who protested were fired. A lot of the long-time WSOP dealers threw in the towel and didn't return. With the current need for so many dealers and the fact that the money they make is nowhere near what they did in the old days, the present situation regarding dealers isn't surprising.

Due to the domination of hold 'em in the modern poker climate, many of the newer dealers aren't experienced in the "off games," so those events can sometimes be dealing adventures that require patience on everyone's part. Most players are understanding and help struggling dealers along.

The most awkward events are in the split-pot games, especially Omaha Eight-or-Better. Some regulars in this game tend to jump in and tell the dealer how to handle the splitting of the pot, or pots, when there's one or more side pots. This often leads to a situation where the dealer gets confused and frustrated and the situation gets out of control. The best way to handle it is to let the dealer do his job unless he makes a mistake, in which case one player should gently correct him. Occasionally a dealer gets lost, puts his ego in check and asks for help, a quality I like.

In the split games when it gets heads up, the normal procedure is to leave each player's bets in front of him, the theory being that it saves time when the pot is split. In tournaments this sometimes gets confusing when players don't have enough smaller chips to put in the correct amount and the dealer and players are put upon to remember how much is supposed to be in front of each player. In this case, I'd just as soon see the bets pulled to the center and correct change made. Unless a pot contains a lot of chips, it doesn't take very long to split and often straightening out the confusion can take longer than it would to split the whole pot. If you have a lot of smaller chips, offering to make change for the big chips can speed things up.

Another issue in split games is that dealers are trained to work on dividing the pot during lulls in the hand. Some dealers do this seamlessly, but less experienced dealers are so intent on splitting the pot that they sometimes miss what's going on. My personal peeve is that the dealer's hands get in my line of view, especially when I'm in one of the seats next to the dealer. I think dealers should be trained that when both players in the seats next to them are in a hand, they should lean back, forget about splitting the pot, and stay out of the way. As I said, it doesn't take very long to split any but the biggest pots. Of course, if

a dealer doesn't immediately go to work on dividing the pot when a hand is in progress, some player is bound to tell him to start splitting the pot, putting the dealer in the middle of an awkward situation.

One last issue I have in Omaha Eight-or-Better is that sometimes a dealer will pull all the chips to the center in a heads-up hand when it's obvious by the board cards that there won't be a low hand. For example, in a heads-up hand, the board reads A-8-9-T-9 and on the river, before the betting is completed, the dealer brings all the chips that were previously in front of the respective players to the center. This essentially alerts the players that there's no low. Players occasionally make errors reading the board in this game and it's never the dealer's province to influence the play of a hand.

Dealers rotate between tournaments, cash games, and satellites. I don't know the particulars of which dealers are chosen for which areas. In tournaments, usually a group of five or six dealers stay with the tournament from when it gets down to about three tables until a winner is determined.

The reality is that even the best dealers occasionally make mistakes, especially as the tournament grinds on and everyone is fatigued. The floor does their best to rectify errors, but sometimes it can be costly to a player. The dealer will feel as bad as the player. Getting upset and letting it affect your future play is counter-productive. Berating the dealer serves no purpose but to get him more upset and prone to further mistakes. As with floor people, befriend the dealers and make their difficult job as pleasant and stress-free as possible and everyone will reap benefits.

## **Support Staff**

Beyond management and dealers is an army of support staff to help the WSOP run smoothly. Among them are cashiers, brush (employees running the waiting lists in the cash games), chip runners, cocktail servers (surprisingly, mostly male), porters who clean up the rooms, parking valets, security officers, food-service personnel, hotel staff, and the people in the poker office. I'm sure there are many I missed. All work long and hard to make the WSOP a premier event. As this is Vegas, many rely on tips to make a decent living.

## **RULES**

Much of the credit for the existence of a comprehensive set of rules for poker goes to my friend Bob Ciaffone, who put together the first rule book for the public in 1984 for the now-defunct Poker Players Association. Bob eventually compiled that work and updates into the modern-rules bible, known as "Roberts Rules of Poker." Bob made it available for public use. To access go to:

<http://www.goldenruleofpoker.com/poker-rules-printer-friendly.htm>

In 2001, Matt Savage, Linda Johnson, Jan Fisher, and David Lamb formed the Tournament Directors Association. One of the main items on their agenda was to put

together a standardized set of rules for tournament poker, using Ciaffone's rule book as a guide. The TDA convenes every two years to review, modify, and adopt new rules. Visit the TDA site at:

<http://www.pokertda.com/>

I can't discuss every rule here, but I'll go over some things you should know:

The first thing you should understand is that everything that happens to any player at any table in a tournament affects every player. For example, "*soft-playing*" is the practice of playing "friendly," or taking it easy against another player in a hand in order to avoid winning his chips. There could be many reasons for this (friend, relative, hot chick, sympathetic character, etc.), but the bottom line is that it's not fair to the other competitors and can be cause for a penalty or disqualification.

Let's say your action of not eliminating a player by soft-playing results in him going on to win the event. That clearly affects every other player who's still in at that point. While soft-playing is hard to prove, there is a rule in place that calls for penalization in the event a player last to act checks the "nuts" (a lock hand), so be aware.

A more sinister practice is called "*chip dumping*", where a player sloughs off chips to a fellow conspirator in the tournament. While difficult to prove, this offense calls for severe penalties.

### **String Bets**

A *string bet* is when a player puts a portion of his bet or raise in the pot and then goes back to his stack for more without announcing his intention. For example, it's a player's turn to bet and, intending to bet 1000, he puts 600 in the pot without saying anything, then goes back to his stack for the other 400. This is a string bet and he would only be allowed to bet 600.

Another example: A player has bet 1000 and his opponent wants to raise to 4000. The opponent puts 2500 in the pot, then goes back for the other 1500. Only the 1500 raise that he put in the pot in his first motion will be allowed.

This is perhaps the most common rules violation committed by novice players. The spirit of this rule is that a player should make his intention crystal clear. The reasoning for this is that if the player to act behind the string bettor doesn't know when the action is completed, the string bettor might gain some information from his opponent's actions, giving him unfair advantage.

The simple solution to avoid string betting is to get in the habit of always announcing your intention before you put any chips in the pot, for example, if you want to raise a bet to 5k total, say "I'll make it 5000" before putting *any* chips in the pot. An example of an ambiguous situation that often arises is when a player bets 1000 and his opponent says "Raise ... four thousand." Does this mean raise 4000 *more*, for a total of 5000, or raise to

4000 total? I've never seen this called, but if questioned the ruling could go either way, so it demonstrates that you need to be crystal clear.

Another action many players make is to say "raise," then put in just the amount of the call before going back for the raising chips. This is OK as long as you're sure you don't put in more than the amount of the call on the first move and that you either announce the amount of the raise or put the full amount of the raise into the pot in one motion. If you were intending to raise a 600 bet to 2500, announced "raise," and put in a single 1000 chip intending it to be your call, you wouldn't be told that you could only raise to 1200 (the minimum raise in this situation).

The TDA rules state that the dealer is responsible for calling string bets. Many dealers balk in this situation and feel it's up to the player to call it. This is faulty thinking, as leaving the onus on the player to call the infraction puts him in the position of tattling his hand. For example, if my opponent commits a string-raise infraction and I have a big hand and want him to put in the full amount of the raise, I won't say anything and allow him to go back to his stack.

However, if I have a hand that can't stand the full raise and I have to speak up to enforce the rule, I'll be giving my opponent information that my hand is weak.

A player not involved in the hand has the right to speak up. Remember, everything that happens affects you. Whether to speak up or not is entirely your option.

### **Reading an Untabled Hand**

One instance where it's not correct to get involved is when a player is holding his cards in the air so you can see them, but he hasn't *tabled*, or placed them face up on the felt. If you notice that he has a winning hand, *do not* point it out to him unless he tables the hand. To do so would violate the "*one-player-to-a-hand*" rule, and would somebody very mad at you.

Once the cards are tabled, any player has the right to point out a winner. Don't count on the dealer to read every hand perfectly. If you notice and intend to point out an overlooked tabled hand, please do it while the cards are still face up and the pot hasn't been awarded. I can recall many instances where a hand has been overlooked and for some reason a player waited until several hands later before pointing out that the pot went to the wrong player. Then all hell breaks loose, the game gets held up, and there are lots of hard feelings.

### **One Player to a Hand**

No player should act in a way as to help another player in the play of a hand. This doesn't include reading a tabled hand, as discussed above. An example of violating the rule: A player make a big raise on 4th street and a player not in the hand says, "wow, the last time he made a raise like that he had the nuts!" The player making the statement is out of line and would be subject to penalty. A good rule to play by is to not say anything about a hand in progress unless you're involved. And if you're involved in a multi-way hand, be careful what you say. Let's say a player makes a big bet into you and there's a player behind you still to act. You say, "I'm pretty sure you're bluffing, but I don't have anything to call you with." This could have an effect on how the next player acts and is unethical and could call for a penalty. Sometimes when there are TV cameras around players will want to garner TV face time and will say things they shouldn't.

### **Oversized Chip**

Another common occurrence and source of confusion is when a player puts a single chip in the pot that's larger than the action calls for. From the TDA rule book: "Anytime when facing a bet (or blind), placing a single oversized chip in the pot is a call if a raise is not first verbally declared. To raise with a single oversized chip, a declaration must be made before the chip hits the table surface. If a raise is declared (but not an amount), the raise is the maximum allowable for that chip. When not facing a bet, placing an oversized chip in the pot without declaration is a bet of the maximum allowable for the chip."

This again emphasizes the importance of announcing your intention. There are many variations on the enforcement of this rule, but the bottom line is that you won't go wrong if you make your intention very clear.

I think a lot of confusion could be avoided if dealers were trained to *say something* if an oversized chip hits the board. If the dealer gets it wrong, it can immediately be corrected by the player. Instead, far too many dealers just sit there and assume everyone knows what's going on. It gets very noisy in poker rooms and it can be very hard to hear what a player said, or didn't say, on the other end of the table. Sometimes I'll ask a dealer if the oversized chip is a call or a raise and he'll say, "He didn't say anything". It's pretty hard to hear somebody not say anything! The best policy is to ask the dealer what the action is if an oversized chip is put in play before you act.

### **Verbal Declarations are Binding**

While announcing your intention is a good policy, you must always pay close attention to the action and be sure you know what's going on before acting. Once you make a declaration, you must follow through (in some situations you have the option of forfeiting the chips already in the pot and folding).

An example of this came in the ME in 2004. Doyle Brunson, at age 70, was again making a run at the ME title. I was having a great tournament that year, with six cashes and three final tables. I got KO'd from the ME in 54th place (in a huge pot where I had KK vs. AK). As I was leaving the table, Tournament Director Matt Savage made an announcement detailing my WSOP performance and my demise. The crowd gave me a loud ovation. As I was getting my cheers, on another table, Doyle had gone all-in with a pair of tens and Bradley Berman (son of Hall-of-Famer Lyle Berman), not hearing Doyle's declaration because of the noise, announced "raise." The dealer told Bradley that he couldn't raise because Doyle had moved in ahead of him. When Bradley realized the situation he tried to take his chips back and fold his weak A-7, but the dealer informed him that since he announced "raise," he had to put his chips in. An ace flopped and Doyle was done, KO'd by Bradley -- and me! I'm not sure whether or not the dealer announced Doyle's action, but if he had and Bradley had heard it, maybe Doyle would have gone on to win his third title and the world might never have heard of Greg Raymer.

### **Chips Cannot Be Taken Out of a Pot**

Once a player put chips in a pot, that's exactly where they have to stay, unless it's an illegal raise.

Let's say a player raises, the player behind him doesn't realize it, and puts in the chips for a call of the pre-raise bet. When informed that the pot was raised, the player has two options. He can either call the raise or forfeit the chips he already put in the pot and fold. Many times this is a result of the dealer failing to announce the action. It most commonly happens when the player on the left of the dealer is blocked by the dealer from seeing or hearing the action of the player on the dealer's right. It also happens when a player has

put in an oversized chip and the action isn't made clear to the table, another reason why dealers should be trained to say something when an oversized chip hits the table.

### **Acting Out of Turn**

Actions out of turn are binding. A player may occasionally make this mistake, for a number of reasons. Once he does, if nothing happens before his actual turn to change the action, he must follow through.

Let's say a player announces "raise" prematurely. The only way he's not committed to raise is if another player raises before the action gets to him. If there's a raise, the player in question has the choice to fold, call, or re-raise. Acting out of turn repeatedly or intentionally can result in a penalty.

## Calling for a Clock

Time is an important factor in tournaments. If a player is taking an inordinate amount of time to make a decision in a hand, any player at the table has the right to call for a clock. Once a floor person comes to the table, he'll announce that the player in question has sixty seconds to make a decision. With ten seconds left, the floor person counts down from ten and if the player hasn't acted by zero, his hand is dead.

Be aware that a lot of players take offense at having a clock called on them and it's a fairly uncommon occurrence.

Perhaps the most famous clock incident was in the late stages of the 2008 ME, when Tiffany Michelle called a clock on Paul Snead, who was deliberating over an important call in a hand with another player. On the ESPN broadcast, it appeared that Tiffany called for the clock rather quickly and her action garnered a lot of negative reactions on poker forums. What wasn't shown on TV was that Paul had pondered for almost five minutes before Tiffany called for the clock, the level was nearly over, she was short on chips, and she had a blind coming.

A couple of lessons here: In reality Tiffany wasn't really put of line calling for a clock in her situation, but calling for a clock can cause negative reactions and TV editing can make you look bad in spots where it might be undeserved.

### **What Constitutes a Raise?**

From the TDA rule book: "A raise must be at least the size of the largest previous bet or raise of the current betting round. If a player puts in a raise of 50% or more of the previous bet but less than the minimum raise, he or she must make a full raise. The raise will be exactly the minimum raise allowed. In no-limit and pot limit, an all-in wager of less than a full raise does not reopen the betting to a player who has already acted."

There are lots of different scenarios where a player will put in more than the chips required for a call, but not enough for a full raise. The above rule is a catch-all that makes the decision easy.

A common situation in tournaments is when the level has gone up and a player makes a raise applicable to the previous level. For example, the blinds have just gone from 200-400 to 300-600. A player living in the past puts in 800, intending to raise. Since at the present level a full raise would be 600 more and the player has only put in 200 of the 600 raise, it would be ruled a call and the 200 would be pushed back. If the player had announced "raise," the raise would stand and he'd put in the extra 400.

### **Keep Chips in View**

Players are required to keep all their chips in plain sight and to keep their biggest chips on top of their stacks or in front. This makes it easy for players to see how much their opponents have.

In 1982 Jack Straus won the title when he discovered a single 500 chip under a napkin after he had made a bet that his opponent had assumed put him all in. That incident coined the saying that a player isn't out of it if he still has "a chip and a chair." Under today's rules, Jack would probably have been required to give the chip to the player who won the pot, he wouldn't have his picture on the wall, and we wouldn't have that cool saying.

## Asking for a Count

You're allowed to ask your opponents how much they have. They're allowed not to answer, in which case the dealer should count for you. Some opponents will ask for a count to gauge your reaction and hopefully pick up a tell.

### **Protect Your Hand**

You should always put something on your hole cards to protect them. Dealers have a tendency to scoop up unprotected cards. I generally just use a chip or two. Some players have elaborate or interesting card protectors.

John Bonetti was a great tournament player and a good guy, but with a very gruff demeanor. My favorite Bonetti story took place in a NLH preliminary event about 15 years ago. John had a bad habit of leaving his cards about six inches in front of him without anything on top to protect them, essentially daring a dealer to take them. I was sitting to his right and watched this unfold: John raised pre-flop, got called in one spot, then bet the flop. After his opponent called, the dealer scooped in the bets, along with John's cards! On fourth street, without a hand, he bet again and his opponent called. The dealer then put out the river card. John looked down and realized his cards were gone. All hell broke loose. He immediately started mf-ing the dealer, as he often did. (No penalties back then!) The floor man came over and made a pretty bad ruling, giving him his fourth street bet back. It was hard to defy John Bonetti back in those days.

Just because you have something on your cards doesn't mean a dealer might not grab them. If this happens, you're probably out of luck, so keep them as safe as possible while still keeping them in view of your opponents.

### **Penalties**

Penalties in poker were first instituted by Jack McClelland in the mid-90's as a means of controlling dealer abuse. Old-time players, for some reason I've never been able to figure out, tended to blame the dealer when they lost a hand. And it seemed, with notable exceptions, that the bigger name the worse the offender. This concept might seem foreign to modern, internet-weaned players who developed their poker skills in games where there was no dealer to blame for losses. (Of course, the random number generator has assumed that role, but it's an ambiguous target.) For many years dealers had little recourse. Players seeing the big names abusing dealers too often emulated their behavior until the situation became untenable and Jack was having a hard time finding dealers to work the tournament. The institution of penalties gave dealers some protection and eventually the abuse subsided.

The F-bomb penalty, which Jack adopted, was an attempt to sanitize the poker environment somewhat as poker moved into the public spotlight. Jack was strict in enforcing penalties at the WSOP. He knew many dealers feared future repercussions if they called for penalties on certain

players, so he had no choice but to err on the side of assessment if there was a protest. I once got a penalty for standing up for a dealer who was a target of abuse. The offending player turned on me and said “Fuck you!” I replied “fuck me?,” and we nearly came to blows. Even though the players at the table explained that I had done nothing wrong, Jack was forced to penalize me for uttering the unmentionable. (The incident made one of the tournament reports, which was available on the internet, and was the only thing my mother ever read about my poker-playing career. Talk about your bad beats! )

From the initial penalties for dealer abuse, throwing cards off the table and foul language, the penalty concept has evolved. The WSOP has its own penalty schedule. I’ll discuss a few:

### **F-Bomb**

In 2005 Harrah’s revived the F-bomb penalty, an automatic penalty for uttering the word under any circumstance. Mike Matusow didn’t waste much time putting the rule in the spotlight with a televised, bomb-laden tirade that resulted in forty minutes worth of penalties. This attempt to sanitize poker proved unwieldy, and in 2009 the enforcement was softened to instances where the dreaded word, or any profanity, was directed at a specific person with malicious intent. Essentially this was an admission that poker is still a colorful, earthy game populated with people who aren’t easily offended.

### **Abusive Behavior**

F-bomb or not, any abusive actions toward dealers, floor people or other players is cause for a penalty. This includes verbal attacks, throwing cards off the table or hard at the muck in anger, and any other forced or unwarranted aggression. This a good rule that prevents the scene from becoming too earthy and colorful. There needs to be some understanding here, however. Poker can be a mentally taxing and frustrating game, and each player needs to find his own way to blow off steam. An example I’ll never forget happened years ago in a game with Puggy Pearson. Pug had a reputation for dealer abuse in his younger days, but had mellowed by this time. He took a particularly bad beat and I could see he was steaming. The dealer had his hand over the muck and Pug gently said to him “Son, take your hand off the muck. I gotta have somewhere to throw these cards.” And with that he tossed them into the muck with just enough effort to open his steam valve, but not hard enough to be dangerous.

### **Excessive celebration**

New in 2008 was this attempt to cut back on theatrics, which had gotten out of hand as players performed in an attempt to garner TV time. I like this rule as I’ve always felt celebrating in your defeated opponent’s face was a classless

move. I never saw this penalty assessed, however. There's a delicate balance between what is over-the-top and what makes good TV, which is all-important these days.

### **English Only**

This rule is aimed at preventing players speaking a language unfamiliar to their opponents to engage in conversation during a hand. This includes people watching a game, and applies to players whether they have a hand or not.

### **Hygiene**

There are a lot of really bad poker players at the WSOP, but only a few of them really stink. In 2009 I heard many complaints about one player who's odor was so offensive that the players near him were sickened. This is going to be a delicate rule to enforce, but I think it's necessary. In tournaments you don't have the option to change tables or seats, so it's only fair that an opponent can't use body odor as a weapon!

### **Intentionally Exposing Cards**

A player who exposes his cards with action pending may incur a penalty, but will not have a dead hand unless it's an extreme case. The penalty will begin at the end of the hand. In the old days showing a card was a ploy used to try to obtain information from your opponents reaction. This practice was banned in tournaments in the '90s, so be aware!

### **Protect Other Players**

Discussing a hand in progress, whether you're involved or not, can be detrimental to the participants. Be careful about disclosing the contents of your hand. Many times players will make an obvious reaction that suggest the contents of a folded hand, such as when two or even three-of-a-kind flop and a player makes it obvious he folded one of that rank of cards. This can greatly affect the play of the hand. If two other players are involved in a hand and are talking to each other, no matter what they say, don't get involved. This happens a lot when TV cameras are around and players seek TV exposure. Also, if you're in a multi-way pot, resist the temptation to discuss anything about the hand in an attempt to gain information. It's unfair to your opponent.

### **Penalty Specifics**

The above infractions, outside of extreme cases, don't threaten the integrity of the tournament and are fairly benign, as are the penalties. Most minor infractions are dealt with by a warning. Repeated offenses are dealt with by escalating penalties, the minimum being the requirement to sit out one hand.

Repeated infractions will draw more severe sanctions, up to disqualification from the event, the WSOP, or ejection from the premises. Beginning in 2009, WSOP staffers track all penalties so repeated offenders could be identified and dealt with.

The problem I have, and have always had with penalties is that they're not uniformly enforced. Dealers and floor people having different attitudes and tolerances for minor offenses and often the dispensation of a penalty is dependent on who see or hears the infraction. I like the warning system, as it gives players and floor people some leeway.

More serious offenses such as collusion, chip dumping, chip stealing, holding out chips or cards, marking cards, or the use of any kind of cheating device will be dealt with harshly, with penalties including forfeiture of chips or prize money, ejection and possible arrest.

### **Some other Considerations**

*Cell Phone Rule*—The following comes from the WSOP website. “Cell Phone Rule: All cell phones and other voice-enabled and “ringing” electronic devices must be turned off during tournament play. Players not involved in a hand (cards in muck) shall be permitted to text/email at the table, but shall not be permitted to text/email any other player at the table. If Rio, acting in its sole and absolute discretion, believes a player is communicating with another player at the table, both parties will be immediately disqualified from the tournament and face imposition of additional penalties as described in Rule 37. All players desiring to talk on a cell phone must be at least one table length away from their assigned table during all said communication. Those individuals who talk on a cell phone not at least one table length away from their assigned table shall be subject to a penalty to be determined by Tournament Staff. No cell phones or other electronic communication device can be placed on a poker table.”

In the modern world a lot of people are tethered to their cell phones. Management was forced to institute rules governing cell phone use as they became a distraction at the table. To me, the rules have always been confusing. The 2010 rule states that all cells must be turned off at the table, but texting will be allowed at the table if a player doesn't have cards, as long as he's not communicating with another player at his table. How can you text or Tweet if your phone is off? I think the rule should read that ringing devices should be silenced, which is what I believe is the intent of the rule. In 2010, it seemed to me that the floor was confused about this rule also. The important thing to know is that if you answer, or even look at your phone while you have cards your hand can be ruled dead.

*Ipods*—Ipods and other music devices and the accompanying headphones are

allowed at the table until play reaches the money in any tournament. I don't really understand the basis of the cut-off point. If they're afraid a player might use his device to cheat somehow, why allow them at all? If that's not the reasoning, why the cutoff? For players who like to listen to music as they play and like wearing headphones to cut down noise, the imposition of this policy is a minor hardship, especially in the ME, where you can play for days after making the money.

I believe that the wonders of modern technology will one day threaten the integrity of poker by making undetectable communication between players a reality. I don't know how management will respond to this threat, but I have a feeling it will result in the banning of all electronic devices.

*Ipads*-Ipads are fairly new on the scene and I'll be interested to see how management handles them this year. In 2010 I saw players using their ipads while involved in a hand! I don't see how this is wise policy. What if they're running a poker analytic like PokerStove? What if someone is see an opponent's hole cards and sending the info to his ipad. Or phone, for that matter. A firm policy is needed here.

*Logos*—With the major sites on the sidelines, I'm curious to see what the logo situation is this year. I'm not sure what the Rio will allow. Could mainstream corporate sponsorship begin to make an appearance?

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Deck Changes**

Each table has two decks of cards. The backs of each differ in color, making it easy to spot if the decks get mixed, and as a security measure against hold-out artists.\* Decks will generally be switched on every dealer change. Players may not ask for a deck change. If a card is damaged a floor person will bring a replacement card.

\*A hold-out artist is a cheater who takes a card out of play to be brought back in at an opportune time to make a better hand. Another deterrent is for the dealer to "count down the deck" to make sure there are fifty-two cards, something dealers are trained to do once each down. It gives me hope when I see one actually do it.

### **Misdeals**

In stud-type games, if any player's down card is exposed, it's a misdeal and the cards will be re-shuffled. In flop games, if either of the first two cards dealt is exposed it's a misdeal. If a card is exposed later in the deal it will be pulled

put and used as the burn card. If two cards are exposed it's a misdeal.

### **Structures and Level Changes**

There are generally printed structure sheets somewhere near the sign up rooms, or you can go to the schedule on the wsop.com website, click on "Structure Sheet" and print it out. Most events have one-hour levels. At the end of a level a floor person will make an announcement and the level will be raised. The time remaining in the level is displayed on the tournament clock. When the time expires, a floor person should be on the spot to announce the level change, or break if appropriate. It's not uncommon, for whatever reason, that the floor isn't vigilant in monitoring the time and things get confusing when the time expires and there's no announcement. The general rule is that the level doesn't change until the announcement is made, so often hands are played at an inappropriate level. Early in an event it might not make a big difference, but in later stages it can have an effect on the outcome of the tournament. If it's break time, some players just get up and leave and the dealer makes the decision to stop play, while on others they keep dealing. Another problem is that many times dealers don't hear the announcement or it's ambiguous as to whether they've started to riffle and an argument ensues I think a solution would be to have a clearly audible sound to signal the end of a level, and to train dealers to immediately stop what they're doing at that point if not in the middle of a hand, not to wait for the floor announcement, which hopefully would come soon after.

### **Dead Button**

A dead button, which is the standard at the WSOP, means it's possible for a player to have the button for more than one hand if an opponent is eliminated in the blind. The alternative to this is known as a "forward moving button", which is a somewhat complicated procedure that isn't used at many venues any more.

### **Empty Seats**

When a player is eliminated in a standard-format event the dealer should make it known to the floor and put out the seat card corresponding to the empty seat, which will be picked up by a floor person. Occasionally a dealer will forget to do this, and a gentle reminder isn't inappropriate.

### **Cards Speak**

Verbal declarations as to the strength of a player's hand aren't binding. The cards, once tabled, determine the winner. A word of caution: sometimes an opponent, whether intentional or not, will misrepresent his hand. *Hold onto your hand until you see the cards and the dealer reads the hand.* Here's a

scenario I've seen more than once: a player is running bad, losing hand after hand and is very frustrated. He's in a pot where a third flush card hits the river and, holding two-pair, he calls an opponent's bet. The opponent says "flush" and the player in question fires his cards into the muck in frustration. Then the opponent turns his hand over and says "I'm sorry, I thought my hand was suited" when in fact it wasn't. Regardless of what was said, the player who still has a hand gets the pot. Intentionally or repeatedly miscalling a hand can be grounds for a penalty, but doesn't foul a hand.

### **Who Must Show His Cards First?**

At the end of the last round of betting, the player who made the last aggressive betting action in that betting round must show first. If there was no bet during the final round, the player to the left of the button shows first, and so on in a clockwise direction. In stud-type games, the player with the high board must show first. In razz, the lowest board shows first.

At showdown, any player at the table may request to see a folded hand from any player who has called all bets on the last round of betting. When I first started playing in Vegas this was virtually never done. Players would take great offense if someone asked to see a losing hand. When Hold'em was legalized in California, for some reasons players there weren't shy about asking to see. Be aware that it is your right, but that few players at the WSOP do it and many players will still take umbrage. (I've never asked to see a losing hand unless I suspected some kind of collusion.) The proper dealing procedure if someone asks to see a hand that a player has declared is a loser is to touch the hand to the muck, making it a dead hand. I've seen it happen where a player asks to see his opponent's losing hand, the dealer fails to "kill the hand" and the player had overlooked a winning hand and is therefore awarded the pot. I've also seen a player, irritated at an opponent constantly asking to see the hand he beat, tell his opponent he that his hand is good, and when the opponent asks to see the hand, having held onto it so the dealer couldn't kill it, then turns it over and says "Oh look, I overlooked my hand. If you hadn't asked to see it I would have mucked!"

If a player asked to see your hand and you deliberately put it in the muck so he can't see it, you can get a penalty. If a player asks to see a hand after it has been put in the muck, his request should be denied.

### **Folding Out-Of-Turn**

To fold your cards before the action gets to you can affect how the hand plays out. This most often happens when a players want to take a quick bathroom or smoke break and leaves the table before it's his turn to act. This is inconsiderate and calls for a penalty. I feel this should be more strongly enforced than it has been in the past.

This rule does bring up a question. I remember clearly in the 1993 ME when Jim Bechtel made a bet and got up and went to the bathroom, calling out "if he raises, I call." If you watch poker on TV, you've probably seen instances where a player goes over to his rooting section, while his opponent is trying to make a decision. While I've never seen it called, under the strict definition of the rule, the player leaving the table could be subject to a penalty.

### **Must Show All Cards**

It takes showing all your cards to be awarded a pot. I've seen instances where a player will only need one card from his hand to have a winner, such as the ace of a suit when there's a four flush of that suit on board, and will show just the ace and throw the other card in the muck. His hand would be dead and his opponent would get the pot.

### **Disputed Hand**

If you disagree with something that happened in a hand, bring it up before the dealer starts to shuffle for the next hand, otherwise it's too late.

### **Live Hand**

A player must be at his or her seat by the time all players have been dealt complete initial hands to have a live hand. Players must be at their seats to call time. "At your seat" is defined as being within reach or touch of your chair.

I prefer another interpretation of this rule where a hand is dead if the player isn't in the seat by the time the first card is dealt off the deck. I like this because it prevents the scenario where a late-returning player walks behind players at this table while returning to his seat and could see their cards while still having a live hand. You should always try to be aware of who is behind you and might get a peek at your hand.

### **Counting the Pot**

An important poker skill is keeping track of the size of the pot. Only in pot-limit games will the dealer tell you how much is in the pot. You are allowed to ask the dealer to spread out the chips in the pot so you can better see what's in it.

## **TIPPING**

Vegas is Vegas, and tips, or tokes in Vegas-speak, are the grease that keeps the town running. There are very few employees you will encounter that won't accept, or expect a toke.

## Dealers

In America\*, dealers are paid minimum wage, or close to it, and rely on tokes for the majority of their income. According to the procedure at the WSOP in 2011, in cash games dealers keep what they individually earn. In some prior years, cash-game tokes have been pooled and split. In one-table satellites, the same dealer deals the whole satellite and keeps his own toke. In tournaments and multi-table satellites, the current model is that a percentage of the prize pool is withheld for dealers and staff.

The tipping issue is controversial and is often a source of hard feelings on both sides. Many players feel that they already pay enough in rake and why should they have to pay the employees on top of that. Many dealers see players winning these huge prizes and feel they deserve a share. The chronology of the toke system at the WSOP goes something like this:

From talking to some of the participants on both sides, I get the impression that in the early days dealers were well taken care of by the players and the whole WSOP “family” was happy with the arrangement. As the tournament grew and participants came from around the world, including places where generous tipping wasn’t customary, dealers tokes began to decline and there was a problem getting good dealers to work tournaments. Mike Sexton saw the problems and in his ground-breaking Tournament of Champions in 1996, he instituted a policy of withholding 3% of the prize pool for the dealers, which seemed satisfactory to everybody involved.

When Jack Binion held the first World Poker Open in his Tunica casino in 1999, he brought in Jack McClelland and Jimmy Albrecht to run the tournament. According to Jack, the only way he could get dealers to come there to work the tournament was to institute the 3% policy. He was one of the first to adopt Sexton’s idea as a regular policy, but soon it spread throughout the industry. Everyone seemed satisfied with the arrangement, me included, since something around 3% was pretty much the standard tip anyway in the bigger tournaments, something Sexton understood when he developed the idea. My consternation with this arrangement was that eventually the 3% would be considered a given, and players not tipping on top of that would be considered “stiffs”.

Under Becky Behnen’s reign the dispensation of the toke pool became a source of great controversy, as she began dipping into the pool to pay casino employees outside of those directly working the tournament. Dealers were irate and protested vociferously. Some veteran WSOP dealers were fired and the whole thing was a mess.

The fallout from Behnen’s actions was that the dealers pool is no longer used to pay outside staff, but the whole tournament staff shares in the pool. A set

percentage goes to the dealers and the rest is divided up among other staff. Dealer's take from the WSOP has dropped significantly from the old days, and many veteran dealers have elected to not work the WSOP.

My concerns about the mandatory tip being taken for granted didn't take long to materialize. It seems every year the winner of the ME is heavily criticized by dealers if he neglects to tip on top of the mandatory tip, being labeled a "stiff."

If you cash at the WSOP, during the tournament cash out procedure you will be asked if you want to leave anything for the dealers. Whether you do so is entirely up to you, but be aware that a percentage has already been taken out for that purpose. Also be aware that dealing is a tough job, so if you can afford it, be generous. Tips are not withheld in cash games and one-table satellites, so tip as you feel is warranted.

If you feel compelled to give a favored dealer a tip at the table in a tournament it will go into the general tip pool.

\*This isn't the case around the world. In Australia, for example, dealers are paid a living wage and aren't allowed to accept tips. Americans are generally considered among the best tippers in the world.

### **Floor People**

Floor people get a share of the toke pool, but will gladly accept additional tips. The "brush people", who handle the waiting lists for cash games and satellites, might be more vigilant in making sure you're taken care of if you "take care of them".

### **Cashiers, Valets, Chip Runners, Brush, etc.**

This is Vegas and tips make the town go 'round. Virtually everybody working the WSOP, outside of the top management, depends on tips to supplement their income. Tipping is a highly personal choice, but if you encounter an employee who you feel adds to your enjoyment of the experience, slip them something.

## **THE RAKE**

The number one enemy of every poker player is the house take. In tournaments and satellites it's known as the entry fee, in cash games it's either a time collection or rake- per-hand. In order to make a profit, players must not only beat opponents, but must beat them for enough to cover the rake. In you're an occasional tournament player you won't really notice the effect of the rake. If

you cash you'll probably be overjoyed and won't notice that you got paid less than you would have had a percentage not been taken out. However, if you're a regular player the rake adds up over time and is a significant drain on your bankroll.

In tournaments, entry fees have shown a steady increase over the years. Pre-Becky Behnen, WSOP events were listed with the buy-in plus the entry fee. For example, \$1000+60. Behnen's innovation was to just collect \$1000, but take the entry fee percentage out of the pool. Another of her innovations was to significantly increase the entry fees, and her method disguised that somewhat.

Benny and Jack didn't charge an entry fee on the ME, figuring the exposure they got from the event offset the need to charge players. One of many reasons players loved Benny and Jack.

To give you an idea of how the entry fees have progressed, in 1986 the entry fee on a \$1500 event was \$25. In 1990 it was raised to \$50. In 2007 6.3% of the buy-in, or about \$95 was the entry fee. In 2010 the fee on the \$1500 events was raised to 7% or \$105, while the rest of the events remained the same as 2009. Here's the house take schedule for 1010. Included is a percentage for tournament staff:

#### Buy-In/House Take

\$500/10%  
\$1000/10%  
\$1500/10%  
\$2500/9%  
\$3000/9%  
\$5000/6%  
\$10,000/6%  
\$25,000/5%  
\$50,000/4%

The take from the \$2500 and \$3000 events has increased from 8% to 9% since 2010. All the rest are the same.

### **AT THE TABLE**

Tournaments are unlike cash games in many ways. For one thing, you can't change tables or seats at your whim. You may get stuck at a bad table (full of good players), a slow table, a table that will break too quickly, or not quickly enough. You might prefer end seats and get stuck in the middle, or vice versa. You might have a seat that's in good playing position relative to the style and skill of your opponents, or you might be stuck with a maniac or super-aggressive

internet phenom on your left who makes your playing life miserable.

To be a successful tournament player you must adapt. Remember, it's not the seat, it's the ass in it!

### **Comfort**

Poker tournaments can be very taxing, both mentally and physically. While few amateurs play a schedule of twenty-plus events as do many pros, a single event of three or more fifteen-hour days tests your mettle. It's very important to be comfortable at the table. I used to carry a bag that contained snacks, my Ipod, some various other items and I could squeeze in a pillow. I also carried a second pillow because I have a short torso and tables aren't uniform in height, so sometimes the table top is too high and makes it uncomfortable to function. In 2009 at the now-defunct Poker Palooza I found a neat item that's a combination pillow/carry bag, so now I only have to carry one thing.

It's also a good idea to dress in layers because it's hard to regulate the temperature of such large rooms and it can get too hot or too cold. When you get to your seat, the dealer will ask for ID and your seat card. If you don't have either you're in for a hassle, especially in the huge-field \$1k events, so be sure you have these things when you head to the poker room. If you lose your seat card, go to the registration line and get a duplicate. I'm not really sure how they'll handle it if you can't produce ID.

As I've mentioned, management's efforts to keep tables nine-handed or less have done much to improve the comfort situation. However, be prepared to start ten-handed in the \$1k events as they will likely sell out and they will require every seat possible. In 2010, the ME was started 10-handed, but Jack Effel assured me it was necessary logistically and wouldn't last long. He was true to his word.

I like to get to my table a bit early to make sure I get my fair share of space. Sometimes the chairs won't be set up around the table uniformly and once players get seated it's sometimes tough to get them to move. You have the right to ask the dealer to "square the table", but you're better off making sure it's right to start with. When you're moved to a new table don't be shy about asking to square up the table if it isn't.

When a seat opens up sometimes players edge into that space, or ask you to, so they have more room. Be aware that another player will be coming to fill that seat, unless yours is the next table to break or they are going to a shorter number of players at the table, such as when they go from ten to nine-handed in a crowded event, or when you down to the last few tables. If you give up your space it may be hard to get it back.

### **The Slow Roll**

There aren't many actions that will draw more universal scorn than to slow roll an opponent. Slow rolling is the act of leading an opponent into thinking he has won a hand before turning over a winner. I looked for a definition online and thought this was a good one:

"To turn over a winning hand in a non-timely fashion, usually done by sleazy players to annoy opponents."

Occasionally a player will genuinely overlook a hand and commit an unintentional slow roll. Most players understand this and a simple apology will suffice.

### **Dodging blinds**

A player who intentionally dodges his or her blind(s) when moving from a broken table must forfeit both blinds and will incur a penalty. This is a classless move that deserves a penalty.

### **Table Demeanor**

Poker can, and should be a lot of fun. I've met many wonderful and very interesting people at the poker table over the years. Do your best to make poker an enjoyable experience for everybody and you'll be helping to grow the game. If you're fortunate enough to get to a WSOP final table, you'll develop a kind of bond with your opponents that could last a lifetime. Unfortunately, not all players enhance the experience. Here are some examples of players who detract from the experience for everybody:

### **The Genius**

To me the cardinal sin at the poker table is to criticize the way an opponent played a hand, whether against you or not. Yet I see it all the time. It's a common occurrence on the internet where people can hide behind a cloak of anonymity and sling insults at opponents without fear of physical reprisal.

Phil Hellmuth's televised antics don't help either, as players think "If Phil does it, it must be cool." The truth is that criticizing in an attempt to embarrass an opponent in order to soothe a wounded ego is incredibly stupid for a few reasons:

- You might educate your target. If an opponent plays a hand poorly, isn't that what you want? So what if he gets lucky and beats you? In the long run he'll lose and, being the genius that you are, you should get your chips back.

- Your target might get upset and leave. While a player isn't likely to leave a

tournament table while he still has chips (your chips), the experience might sour him on the game and he be hesitant to return. To repeat, the goal of any poker player should be to help grow the game by making it enjoyable for everybody.

A common comment is the sarcastic “nice hand”. Ok, if it makes you feel better.

### **Hoodies and Sun Glasses**

And Ipods. Ok, I admit I listen to an Ipod sometimes. Long days at the poker table can get somewhat boring and a little music helps. But I like to wear the headphones in a way that I can still hear what’s going on and if someone’s speaking to me. The new generation’s affinity for hoodies and sunnies leads to a sullen and unfriendly atmosphere. I know, we’re playing for a lot of money and poker’s a game of concentration, but if the players who come for a good time are met with an army of sullen, mute opponents, pros are going to end up playing against each other and the house is going to end up the only winner. There needs to be a balance.

### **Out-Of-Control-Players**

Poker can be a very frustrating game. A player who has lost control of his emotions is considered to be “*on tilt*”. In general the damage a tilting player does is to his own stack of chips. Occasionally, however, a player crosses a line. In 2009 a player broke a dealer’s hand when the dealer reached for his cards in a way he felt was inappropriate. He was arrested, as he should have been. A player who has lost control creates an uncomfortable situation for everybody, and penalties are often a constructive “time out”. The bottom line is play your heart out, but do your best to be civil and have fun.

### **Bad Beats**

Losing a hand where you were a big favorite at some point is known as a *bad beat*. Everyone gets them; it’s a large ingredient in the game. It’s how you react to bad beats that matters. If you react badly, you’ll find yourself on tilt, which can lead to poor play and a deterioration of your chip stack. The magnitude of bad beats are very situational. I once lost a hand where I flopped four aces and got beaten by two running cards that made my opponent a royal flush. I was a 989-1 favorite on the flop. It was a small limit game and my opponent just called on the river, not knowing what she had! I thought it was amusing and didn’t get upset at all. Compare that to what happened to Don Zewin, a veteran Vegas player, in the 1989 ME when he got all-in with TT against Phil Hellmuth with AT and Steve Lott with 22. Zewin was a 51% favorite to win a huge pot that might have propelled him to the title. But an ace flopped, Hellmuth won the hand and went on to win the championship and become all

things Phil, while Zewin was out in 3rd. Don took it hard and if you ever see him walking around shaking his head, he's probably still thinking about that hand.

### **Playing With the Big Guys**

If you play in WSOP events there's a good chance you'll wind up at a table with a recognizable player. The true pros, especially the old timers, know how to entertain. The most engaging player I've ever played with is Amarillo Slim. His gift for entertaining is a big reason why poker grew as it did in the old days. While players who have been around Slim for a while have heard all his stories and sayings a million times, they're great the first time or two. Doyle is also fun when he gets to talking. T.J. Cloutier is instructive at the table, and there's a lot to be learned from him. Phil Ivey is surprisingly willing to engage in conversation. There's a lot to be learned from him too, just by watching him play. My favorites were the old Southern road gambles, but sadly there aren't many left.

Sometimes you'll get two big names together at your table, and then the fun really begins. I was at a Pot-Limit Omaha table at the 2005 WSOP with Doyle and Phil Ivey (an event won by Ivey). The "Big Game" players love to play "*props*" a game of side bets they've developed over the years that entails betting on the cards that hit the board in flop games. It's evolved into a very complex affair that I don't really understand. There were only about four tables left in this big event, but Doyle and Phil were so involved in the props that the game was secondary, which made sense because they were playing for more than the first place money. I finally said to Phil, "how can I possibly get a read on how the flop fit your hand when all you care about is how it hit your prop?" Not that I can read Phil, anyway.

### **The Cards**

The playing cards have been the subject of some controversy in recent years. In 2007, Harrah's introduced a revolutionary new style of card called "*poker peek*." They almost caused a player's revolution. I'm not sure who came up with this idea, but as you can see below, the cards are very confusing and hard to read. They brought in new cards as quickly as possible, but the poker peek cards had to be used for two events before replacements arrived and they were permanently retired. I give Harrah's credit for trying to be innovative, but the cards should have been put to a trial run before being introduced into actual play at the WSOP.

A constant issue with cards are "nail marks," indentations in the cards caused by undue pressure from a player's fingernail. While I can't spot a nail mark unless the light hits it just right, there may be players who can. But I don't think nail marks are necessarily a sign that cheaters are at work. I think most nail marks are a result of players squeezing their cards, especially the low cards and aces, which is where most of the nail marks appear. Players in low-oriented games, such as razz, 2-7, and the split games, like to peek at their

cards by bending back the sides and seeing how many pips are along the side. If there aren't any, they know it's an A, 2, or 3. If there are two, it's a 4 or 5, and if there're three, it's a 6,7, or 8. In order to peek this way, they must hold the card down with a fingernail and bend it back, often leaving a mark. I'm not saying that no one is using nail marks to identify cards, but I don't lose sleep over it. If I see a card with an obvious nail mark, I point it out to the dealer, who should take it out of play and call a floor person, who will bring in a replacement card.

In recent years the cards used at the WSOP have been of a higher quality and don't get nailed as easily, but when they do it's pretty noticeable.

### **Peeking at Your Cards**

You should find a way to peek at your cards so no one but you can see them. This may sound obvious, but it's surprising how many players are sloppy with their cards. Be aware of who's behind you and try to ensure they can't see your hand. It's not unheard of for a confederate to signal, or "send over" a player's holdings to a player at the table. With a little practice you should be able to find a way to peek that's secure.

### **Cheating**

I don't know a lot about cheating. I think it would be naïve to think that it's non-existent in a setting with so much cash around. I also think it's nonproductive to spend too much time worrying, or writing, about it. Doyle has said that the best deterrent to cheating is the players, who will notice if something is amiss. If you see something you think is suspicious, relate it to a floor person. Be vigilant, but not obsessed to the point where it affects your game.

### **If You Must Leave the Table**

Sometimes you simply must leave the table during non-break times. In the unlikely event that it's such an emergency that you can't finish out the hand, your hand will be killed. Be aware that if you leave before it's your turn, you could be assessed a penalty. If you leave between hands, you'll be dealt in and are responsible for any of the obligations of your seat, such as blinds, antes, and in stud games the bring-in if applicable.

### **2-7 Sit-Out Hands**

If you play the 2-7 Triple Draw event, or any mixed-game event that includes 2-7, understand that it's a six-handed game, but the tables contains up to eight players. In an eight-handed game, the two seats in front of the blinds are dealt out. If it's seven-handed, the seat in front of the blind is dealt out. I like this,

as it gives me an extra little break for the bathroom or whatever.

### **Keeping the Game Moving**

Managing the number of the different denominations of chips in order to keep play moving as smoothly as possible is a tricky proposition. If too many smaller denomination chips are in play, stacks can get unwieldy. If not enough, there's a constant need for players to make change for one another. While management does its best, at times in almost any event, things get bogged down. Players can help keep the game moving by making change for one another when appropriate, instead of waiting for the dealer to take care of it. Experienced players sometimes just toss chips to one another without saying anything, with the understanding that change is required.

I've seen players, wanting to amass large stacks of chips, who refuse to make change. This is a selfish attitude that does nothing but slow down the game. Other players insist on using stacks of smaller chips when a few big chips would do the job. This is also a waste of time. If the tables become bogged down with too many small-denomination chips as players are eliminated, the floor may come by before the chipping-up procedure and ask players to fill some racks with the smaller chips to be exchanged for larger-denomination chips to get them out of the way. If a floor person gives you a rack for this purpose, it's not vital that you do it immediately. Stay focused on the important things and fill the rack during down time.

### **Noise**

The tournament rooms are large and can get very noisy. The primary thing as a player is to make sure you don't miss hearing something that can cause you to make a costly mistake. Headphones can help alleviate the din, but also pose the danger that you don't hear something important. You need to find what works for you.

One source of noise is players chip shuffling, a habit of constantly riffling chips together that's shared by many players. This is something I've done subconsciously my whole career and find it nearly impossible to stop. I guess it bothers some players who aren't used to it. I once had a player tell me it was annoying him and could I stop. I told him I was sorry, but you could tie my hands behind my back and I'd probably still find a way to do it.

In 2005, the first year at the Rio when internet qualifiers swelled the field in the ME to 5,619 players, I was playing in the packed Amazon Room for my session and noticed something I couldn't put my finger on. Then it hit me. For a room with this many players, there was a noticeable lack of chip-shuffling clatter. Then I realized that most of the players were Internet players who weren't accomplished chips shufflers, so the noise I expected from a room full of poker players was absent.

## **Staying Focused**

Many players new to the WSOP might be in for the unfamiliar experience of having a bunch of people watching them play. This can happen if your table is near the rail, or if there's a recognizable player present, or as you get deeper in the event. A number of other things can happen that can be distractions. It's vital to be able to tune everything out and focus on playing your game.

In 2009 I was playing in the 2-7 Triple-Draw event, which was down to about five tables. Daniel Negreanu, who always draws a crowd, was at my table, sitting on my right. Then a table was broken and Julie Schneider, the wife of 2007 WSOP Player of the Year Tom Schneider, was moved to my left. Julie's a good player in her own right and kind of, um, outspoken, as viewers of the 2009 ME on WSOP might attest to.

Apparently, Julie had some kind of issue with Daniel and didn't want to talk to him. Daniel didn't know who she was and was unaware of the problem. Daniel was unsuccessfully attempting to engage her in conversation, while Julie wanted to tell me all about her issue with Daniel. I really just wanted to play cards, but was caught between these two.

On the break Daniel "tweeted," "Moved to a table with a lady at it. She's a bit of a whackjob surprise?" Of course, someone showed this to Julie and it was really on. Happily, the table broke before too long and I was able to get back to focusing on poker!

## **TV Tables**

The real test of your powers of focus will come if you land at a TV table. It can be nerve-wracking if you're not used to it. In 2011 the only televised events will be the \$50K Player's Championship, the 25k Heads Up, the ME "Grudge Matches" events (reprising past battles between Chris Moneymaker and Sammy Farha, Johnny Chan and Phil Hellmuth, and Johnny Chan and Erik Seidel) and extensive coverage of the Main Event.

It's a shame that some of the smaller prelim events are no longer on the TV menu. They gave everyone a shot at their moment in the sun and many amateurs garnered life-long bragging rights. But ESPN knows what brings them the highest ratings and adjusted their schedule accordingly.

If you play the ME you could end up on TV at any time from Day 3 on, as there's a primary and secondary TV table beginning on Day 3. ESPN producers try to pick the tables with the most TV appeal. In 2009 I came back from dinner break to find that my table had been moved to the secondary TV table, a special table set up on a ministage

off to the side. I couldn't figure out why they moved us, except there was an empty seat when we went to dinner. I knew it was going to be filled by somebody special. And the answer was ... Phil Ivey!

TV tables have a keyhole camera at every seat, located on the rail under the leather rail, and you're told to look at your cards so the camera has a clear view of them. It's a bit awkward, as you need to arrange your chips so they're not blocking the camera and you need to be careful to peek at your cards in a way so that your opponents can't see them. The table has a high rail and the whole process is a bit uncomfortable.

Poker is a game where you're generally the only one who knows your cards and unless you go to showdown, no one else will ever know. Not so at a TV table, where every hand you pick up is recorded, so if you make a donkey play, it might end up on ESPN, to be shown over and over and over. Of course, you could make a world-class play and become a legend, so don't be nervous.

My first TV table was in 2004 and I still see it sometimes on reruns. My swan song was with 99 vs AJ, and no matter how many times I see it, the jack always flops and I go home! Don't worry too much, though, because unless you're a big-name player or are involved in a hand with one, your hands probably won't make the TV cut. Just play your game and try to forget about the rest.

There's a pretty big difference between the primary and secondary tables. If you've watched the ESPN shows, you've seen how the primary table gets most of the airtime, while only the occasional interesting hand from the secondary table gets shown. I think I only had one hand shown from that session, when I got all in with 88 against the A9 of, who else, Phil Ivey. I survived that one! The primary table is in a mini-stadium and a decent crowd usually is watching. The secondary table in 2009 was off to the side kind of away from the action, and the only people watching were friends, family, and assorted media.

There are also roving camera crews who film any hands on the non-TV tables they find interesting. During the early levels of the ME these hands usually feature big-name players, or players who perform for the camera or wear something outrageous and get noticed. I think producers have gotten a little better in recent years about showing more poker and less of the circus acts. As the tournament gets near the big money they lean more toward hands that have an impact on the outcome.

In 2009 I didn't get back to the TV table, but had two hands make the TV cut, both naturally against Mr. Ivey. In the first I flopped a set against his overpair and it held up, even though he said to me, "I'm pretty good in these situations, you know," a clip that made the highlight reels. In the second hand, I tried a bluff that failed miserably. I need to find easier targets!

## **Sponsorship**

One of the main effects, other than not being able to play at home, for the average player is that the sponsorship money that was available in the past from the major sites for wearing their patches on TV has dried up. The chances for players making additional money from deep runs in the TV events are severely limited.

### **Personalities**

You'll meet all kinds of characters at the table. It's part of the experience and fun. If you play a full tournament schedule like I do (twenty or more events), an entertaining personality is a godsend as far as injecting a little humor to break up the tedium.

I've mentioned Slim and Doyle, and in fact most of the old Southerners like to talk and are pretty funny. If celebrity sighting is your thing, now that the Ante Up for Africa event has been discontinued, the ME is your best opportunity. I'm always amazed when I read accounts of the ME at the number and variety of celebrities who played, but I rarely notice them because there are so many players and for the most part celebrities try to be nondescript so they can focus on playing the game. If you see cameras swarming around someone you don't readily recognize, especially if he doesn't have a giant stack, it's probably some sort of celebrity.

In the 2-7 event mentioned above, when we redrew tables one of the funniest guys I've ever played with, a Swedish pro named Peter Hedlund, who has a reputation for non-stop talking and an affinity for beer, drew a seat near me. Peter admitted to having little experience in 2-7, but had been running good and was refraining from drinking. Once his run of cards reverted to the norm he started ordering beers two at a time, all the while complaining of the swill that is American beer. But the swill did the trick and his act had me rolling. It was a welcome bit of jocularly that helped re-energize me.

My favorite bit from Peter came when I lost a hand to John Juanda where he drew two on the first draw and made the second nut hand. After the hand, Juanda and another player were discussing all the options he had for playing the hand to maximize the value of his lucky draw. Apparently, this irked Peter, who thought there was a bit too much self-congratulation, and he said, "In Sweden we having a saying, "It's easy to crap when your ass is full!"

### **The Final Table -- Making Deals**

There's a lot of money at stake at final tables and often deals are struck between players to flatten out risk and guarantee a good payday. This has been a controversial subject in the modern days of televised poker. In other sports, such as golf and tennis, players making surreptitious deals to split prize money are dealt with severely. Overseers of those sports feel the viewers who pay to see those events deserve to see a competition where players are battling for

their share of the prize pool without a safety net. The difference between those sports and poker is that golfers, for example, are playing for a share of a prize pool that's paid for by sponsors and spectator contributions, while poker players generally put up all the prize money. Most poker players feel it's their money and they a right to do with it as they choose. In events where the prize pool is put or added to by the promoters, I agree they have a right to dictate these terms. But in events where player put up all the prize money, I feel players have every right to make deals. Harrah's official stance is that they don't recognize and won't facilitate deals.

The specifics of deal-making go beyond the scope of this book. We cover it in some detail in *Kill Phil*.

If you choose to make a deal, you need to be aware of the tax implications. Harrah's will not get involved in the deal-making in any way. The prize money will be awarded and the W-2Gs issued according to the official order of finish. You should feel comfortable that you can trust the people with whom you make deals. I recommend having several witnesses to any verbal deal. When I won my bracelet in 2007, I made a small save when heads-up. The cashier provided me with IRS form 5754, on which I recorded my opponents pertinent tax information. (They might not still provide those forms, but they're just for recording information, so they aren't necessary. Just make sure you obtain the names, addresses, Social Security numbers, and amount to be distributed from all the players involved. It's also a good idea to pay by check to have a paper trail.) At the end of the year, I filed a 1099 to correctly distribute the winnings.

## **THE MAIN EVENT**

It should be obvious by now that there's much more to the WSOP than the ME, but that's not to diminish its importance. While winning a WSOP bracelet in any event is a poker player's dream, the ME title is the crown jewel. Win it and your poker future is secure!

The Rio takes on a whole different air as the ME approaches. Speculation on the number of entrants runs rampant, with sizable wagers backing gambler's opinions. This year should be particularly interesting. The satellite action amps up as low-budget players try to find a way into the ME. While only the hard-core poker media are in attendance for the prelims, the ME draws journalists from around the globe. This is the apex of the poker world!

As in the past few years, in 2011 there will be four Day 1 sessions, July 7-10, each beginning at noon. I like to schedule my session so I get the most rest possible going into the event and also between my Day 1 and Day 2 sessions, assuming I get that far. If you play either Day 1a or 1c, you'll come back on July 11<sup>th</sup> for your Day 2 session. If you play Day 1b or 1d, you'll come back on the 12<sup>th</sup>. This is being done because the last two Day 1 sessions are the most popular and lead to a situation last year where they were close to having too many players remaining for those sessions going into Day 2.

Everyone gets a day off on the 13<sup>th</sup> before all remaining players return for Day 3 on the 14<sup>th</sup>.

Some out-of-town players come in for the last session so they can cut down on the number of days on the road. If you have a preferred session, you should probably enter early. If you're from out of town, schedule carefully. If you play the first Day 1 session and make it to Day 3, you could be in Vegas for seven nights with only two days of play. This is why many players prefer the last Day 1 session. So to repeat, if you know you want to play the fourth Day 1 session, enter early so you don't get shut out.

## **Play Time**

Prior to each Day 1 session, there's a unique type of hoopla, with a different celebrity kicking off the day's play. The first session usually has the most going on in the way of pomp and circumstance.

Once play begins, you'll settle into a rhythm. Levels are two hours long with a 20-minute break scheduled at the end of each level. The breaks can be congested, especially with all the extra people in the building that the ME attracts. The 90-minute dinner break is after the 3<sup>rd</sup> level, at around 7:00. If you plan to have a formal dinner, I suggest making reservations as early as possible to beat the crowds. If you have a Harrah's Diamond card, it should help.

In past years, dealers had a sign to hold up to alert the TV people when there was a called all-in hand, so TV crews will be hustling around the floor. If you get up from your seat while a TV crew is around, don't be surprised to find a camera man in your space. You could conceivably have your hand killed if you're not in your seat in time (I've seen it happen), so make sure the dealer or floor understands the situation.

At the end of your Day 1 session, don't be surprised if play slows to a crawl as a lot of players stall in an effort to make it to Day 2. If it happens at your table, don't let it upset you, as there's not much you can do about it. Just go with the flow and be happy to make it to Day 2 yourself! And use their reluctance to get involved to pick up some easy chips!

Just like in all events, the card is drawn at the end of the day to determine the number of hands to be played, then the bagging-up process takes place.

With the triple-chip starting stacks, the ME moves more slowly than in previous years. Only about one-third of the Day 1 field will be eliminated. If you're one of the casualties, you must get up from the table immediately and go outside the ropes. If you happen to be one of the chip leaders at the end of the day, you might be asked to do an interview for one of the media outlets. It's all part of the show!

Everyone gets at least one day off after their Day 1 session. Get some good rest, because if you get deep you'll have some long days ahead. Once you get to Day 3 there are no more days off until the November Nine break, when the final table is reached on Day 8.

## **The Main Event Bubble**

The ME bubble is a key point in the tournament, usually occurring on Day 4. The “hand-for-hand” process, where every table must finish a hand before the next one starts, begins five players away from the money. About 10% of the field makes the money and should do a little better than double their buy-in. In 2010 places 676-747 each got paid \$19,263.

Each “hand-for-hand” hand takes 10-15 minutes. Some floor people will try to be strict about keeping players in their seats between hands, but they have a tough job, as players tend to gravitate to tables where there's a chance of a player being eliminating. I like to use the time for extra bathroom breaks or to take a quick walk to try to stay focused. As in most recent years, the “bubble boy” doesn't go away empty-handed. Last year he got a paid buy-in to this year's ME. Of course, this creates a “bubble-boy bubble,” but there's only so much they can do.

Once the bubble breaks, players get eliminated quickly, as many had been barely holding on. As the parade of busted players to the cashier grows, the cash out process can get very time-consuming. If you don't need to get paid immediately it's probably best to come back at a later time when the crowd diminishes.

## **Getting Deeper**

If you make it to Day 5, you'll find a whole different atmosphere. The circus hasn't left town, but there are fewer clowns. The playing area is much smaller, with about 50 tables remaining. There's increasingly more and more space between tables as the number is reduced. Media scrutiny of the remaining players becomes more intense. While the structure sheet states the number of levels to be played on Days 4-6, management has in mind a number of players they want to get down to each day, and play could end for the day earlier than scheduled.

## **The Fatigue Factor**

One of the most welcome announcements I ever heard came in 2009 on Day 4 when play was called for the day at the end of the third level, prior the dinner break. A lot of players just come in for the ME and are really pumped up. But after six long weeks, I was running on empty.

I remember in 2004 I came back for one of the later days to a table full of kids who were playing their first ME. They had so much energy they were bouncing off the walls, while I was trying to prop my eyes open. They couldn't understand how I wasn't as enthusiastic as they were. The 2004 WSOP was a successful, but very long and hard series for me. I generally go along fine until I start getting deep in events, and then the build-up from repeated long days begins to take its toll. When I finally busted from the 2004 ME in 54<sup>th</sup> I was fried. Had I won that hand, adrenaline would have kept me going, I guess, but at some point you're going to crash, which I did for the next few days.

In 2007 I finally got my first WSOP bracelet, but it was in one of the later events and I had another hard crash that pretty much lasted into the ME, where I definitely wasn't at my best.

People talk about why professional players don't do better in the ME. I think fatigue is a big factor, as most pros play a very strenuous schedule. One trap I fell into in 2007 was depending on energy drinks to get me through. While they do the trick as far as pumping you full of caffeine and other energy-boosting substances, the lasting effects, combined with the fact that coming down from a day's play full of hands that play over and over in your mind, make it very hard to sleep.

Back to 2009: I came in for Day 4 having not slept a wink the night before. It wasn't due to anything other than adrenaline and excitement at getting that deep. The early break that day, which let me get home by 7 p.m., gave me time to make a bit of a recovery. Better still, the following day we got out even earlier, allowing me to rebuild my reserves for the stretch run.

Some players are marvels of stamina. Phil Ivey was probably more grateful than I was for the early-outs, but it was because there was a monster cash game going round-the-clock at the Bellagio. Along with his run at the title, Phil spent his nights in Bobby's Room playing in an insanely high cash game. David Benyamine told me he was on the same schedule throughout the entire WSOP, sleeping maybe two hours a night throughout. I don't know how they do it!

### **Preparing for the Next Day's Play**

Along with whatever your personal regimen is for getting mentally and physically ready to play, there's something you can do that could prove valuable. The following day's redraw for tables and seats is usually available online in the morning on the WSOP website. You should have time to find your new table and do some research. Look at the chip stacks and see how they compare to yours and where the big and small stacks are seated in relation to you. Then research the players by name. A good source is [thehendonmob.com](http://thehendonmob.com), where they maintain a database of tournament players and results. I do this every day in every event I play, in order to help formulate a game plan. You can also google the players and see what you come up with. You might discover that they're internet phenoms, etc. If you can't find them anywhere, it doesn't necessarily mean they're inexperienced players, but it's a clue.

If you're deep in the ME, get to the Rio early, if possible, to familiarize and get comfortable with your seat and the layout of the room. The layout of the room changes every day during the late stages of the ME, and I like to feel comfortable with the surroundings before I pick up a hand. Remember, it just takes one lapse to end the dream! It's really strange on late days when less than one-hundred players remain. The parking lot is mostly empty and the mob of people is mostly gone. It's pretty quiet and completely different, but that doesn't take away from the excitement.

## **The November Nine**

The innovation of the break of nearly four months between the end of Day 8, when they play to the last nine players, and the playing of the final table was very controversial when introduced. Personally, I like the idea of the break. For one thing, it gives players a chance to recover physically and be at their best. For another, it gives players time to line up sponsorships and make the most of what is likely a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And it fits in nicely with the ESPN TV schedule, as the event is shown shortly after it happens.

I wish I could tell you what it's like to actually be a November Nine'er. Stay tuned!

## **BEING A SPECTATOR**

The WSOP is a spectacle that's worth checking out in person. The sheer size of the tournament area can be overwhelming. The playing areas are partitioned off by a barrier, known as "the rail". With so much poker action and so many events going simultaneously it can be tough to decide where to position yourself to get the best view of the action. This year the Amazon Room will be dedicated to tournament play. All cash games will be in the Pavilion Room. There should be plenty of tables near the rail where you can get a good view, but it's sometimes hard to determine just what it is that you're watching. If you're in the Amazon Room and there are very few sweating the table, it's probably one of the smaller buy-in events or some kind of satellite. A more crowded rail probably indicates a bigger event or known personality. A glance at the tournament clock in the vicinity can give a clue as to which event you're watching. Or just ask another fan. There's also the final table arena, which in past years has been surrounded by bleachers and a raised viewing area, and had large monitors overhead showing close ups of the play. On busy days an announcement will be made a few minutes before breaks for spectators to clear the room so players going on break have room to move.

The bracelet ceremony, a recent innovation where bracelets from the previous day's concluded events are awarded, takes place every day in the Amazon Room at 2:20.

Photos can be taken in the tournament areas, but flash photography and any sort of filming is prohibited.

When not watching poker you can grab a bite in the Gut Shot Grill, which replaced the Poker Kitchen and has been moved to the Miranda Room.

Most players are happy to take to time to sign autographs and take pictures with fans. However, you should understand that the playing breaks are pretty short and that it's sometimes a struggle for players to take care of the things they need to do on break and still have time for fan requests, so be understanding if a player politely refuses your request if they are hurried. The best time to approach players is fifteen minutes or more before the start of the day's play, on dinner breaks, or at the end of a day's play.

It's really amazing to me, as it is to all veteran players, just how famous poker players have become. Ordinary players who were in the right place at the right time, or won a timely big event, or have a personality that appeals to the masses are suddenly stars. When I first met Mike Matusow he was just another idiot with a big mouth. Now he's "The Mouth", poker superstar. Phil Hellmuth is a household name, as is Doyle Brunson. I think the really famous players have grown into the role. Personally, it's still a bit uncomfortable, although flattering, when I'm asked to sign an autograph.

## **TV AND INTERNET COVERAGE**

If you can't make it to the Rio in person, there are still lots of ways to follow the action. While ESPN coverage of the smaller buy-in preliminary events has been curtailed starting in 2009, In 2011 Harrah's has stepped in with coverage on WSOP.com, albeit without hole cards, of the final tables of the 55 bracelet events not covered by ESPN. This is a really cool innovation that will let fans sweat their favorite players any time they make a final table. Kudos to hurrahs on this one!

ESPN will have 32 hours of their normal, edited coverage beginning July 26th, including the 25k Heads Up, the 50k Players Championship, the staged "Grudge Matches" and extensive coverage of the ME. In addition to the edited primetime shows, these events will be featured on ESPN3 with a 30-minute delay and no hole cards. Also, ESPN2 will feature semi-live (30-minute delay) broadcasts of the ME from Day 3 through Day 8. Included in the scheduled 32 hours will be coverage of the two feature tables where selected hole cards will be shown.

These innovations are a great advancement for poker fans. I'm not sure what would have happened had Black Friday occurred before these plans were already set, but I hope they're really successful and will continue to bring extensive poker to fans in coming years.

### **Watching the Main Event**

The final table of the ME is held in November in the Penn and Teller Theater at the Rio. I went in 2009 to sweat my friend Kevin Schaffel, who got tickets for me and a bunch of his friends and family. The atmosphere is really charged and it was fun to be there for all the pre-event festivities, but once the play started I lost interest pretty quickly. I guess I'm spoiled by the hole card cam. The good news was that when I left somebody from a long line of enthusiastic fans waiting to get in got my seat. If you want to see the event live and don't have connections to get a ticket, I'd recommend getting there either very early or late in the day when seats should open up. All in all, for a poker fan it's a pretty cool site to see, at least for a while.

## **SATELLITES**

Satellites are a self-contained mini-tournament that award one or more tournament seats, or tournament chips, to qualifying players. Satellites can take different forms, the most popular being one-tables and megas.

Satellites are a large part of any modern poker tournament. While ostensibly a method to gain entrance to the tournament events, some players use satellites as a game unto itself. I used to feel that the one-table satellites for the ME were one of the best money-making opportunities for a poker player. There were so many players trying to find a way into the ME that the satellites were full of lesser-experienced players. Unfortunately, I have to budget my time and energy during the WSOP, and satellites were a casualty. This doesn't mean they're any less juicy, however.

At the WSOP, satellites are located in their own section in the Pavillion Room. It will open on May 30.

## **Types of Satellites**

### **One-table satellites**

One-tables are similar to sit-n-goes, except usually there just one winner. At the WSOP there will be numerous one-tables for every bracelet event. The minimum buy-in for a one-table at the Rio will be \$125. To enter any one-table just find the floor person in charge of the one-table lists, give him your name (usually first name and initial will do) and listen for them to call your satellite when they get enough players and a free table and dealer. You shouldn't have to wait too long.

One-tables are structured so they usually last about two hours, with no scheduled breaks. If you get down to two or three-handed players might agree on a quick bathroom break. As players are eliminated you can pull out chairs and get more comfortable. Winners of one-tables are paid in tournament buy-in chips, plus a bit of cash. The chips can't be used to buy into other satellites. You don't have to enter the event the satellite is associated with. For example, a one table for a \$2500 event will be paid in five \$500 tournament chips plus \$120 in cash. The reason they charge a bit extra for the buy-in and give the odd cash is so players will have something to tip the dealers with. Staff tips are not withheld from one-tables, so a tip is customary. The 3% guideline is reasonable.

A lot of players like to make deals when it gets to two or three-handed. Whether you enter into the deal-making is entirely up to you. Some regular satellite players are very good at making deals that benefit them, so consider carefully before agreeing to a deal. The anatomy of a deal in a 2500 satellite could be: Two players take two 500 chips and the third takes one, and some kind of split of the cash is made with a provision for the tip. Some players like to collect buy-in chips in this way and then choose which events they want to play. Other sell the chips to players buying in to the events. Many players will give full value for the chips. Other will try to pay a little less. I'd recommend not selling the chips at a discount unless it's near the end of the WSOP and you're worried about

getting stuck with them. Whatever you do, don't take them home figuring you can use them next year, because tournament chips for the 2011 WSOP expire on July 10.

Another feature of one-tables that you may encounter is the "last longer" pool. It's likely that someone will propose a last longer wager to add a little extra action to the satellite. The way this works is that an amount will be determined, usually a hundred or two, and one player will collect and hold the money from anyone interested. You have no requirement to join, and there shouldn't be a lot of peer pressure. The player who lasts longest in the satellite out of the players who have entered in the pool wins the whole pool, or maybe there will be first and second place. It's up to the players and the house won't get involved. It's one of the rare, juice free bets in poker. Sometimes there are deals made to chop up the pool among the players who are still in. If the player who is holding the cash gets knocked out, he'll give the money to one of the players in the pool who still has chips.

The house makes its money on one-tables by taking a piece out of the prize pool. For example, a typical satellite for a \$1500 event will charge ten players \$175 each and will pay three \$500 buy-in chips and \$120 cash. That adds up to \$1620, so \$130, or \$13 per player is the house rake.

### **Mega-satellites**

Megas are satellites that consist of more than one table and are conducted like a full-field event. The first mega is scheduled for May 31, other than a \$1570 mega for the 25k Head's Up on May 30. The schedule, as well as other FAQ's can be found at:

<http://www.wsop.com/2011/WSOP-2011-FAQ.pdf>

Megas take significantly longer than one-tables to come to a conclusion, and are generally are contested for the bigger buy-in events, primarily the Main Event. Megas start at a set time, and players buy-in at the same cage used for the other events. They have set breaks and chips-offs like a regular event. There are no rebuys in any of the megas at the WSOP. Players can enter up to an hour late.

All the buy-in money is put into a pool and divided by the buy-in for the event associated with it to determine the number of seats to be awarded, after 3% is taken out for tournament staff. Any money left over will be paid to the next finisher in cash. For example, if a \$300 mega has 300 players, there will be \$90,000 in the prize pool. Removing 3% leaves \$87,300. This figure would be divided by \$10,200 (again the extra cash is for tipping money) which results in eight players getting seats, plus \$5700 being awarded to the ninth-place finisher.

If there's not enough cash in the pool for a full buy-in, the winner will be awarded the whole pool in buy-in chips and cash. If there are a small number of seats to be awarded, there may be a deal proposed by remaining players toward the end. These deals can get

very creative. As in the one-tables, no player is under any obligation to participate in a deal.

Unlike one-tables, the winners of megas *are* obligated to play the associated event, so be sure you can play the event in question before you enter. If the winner of a mega wins a second seat for a particular event, he will be paid in buy-in chips.

If you enter a ME mega close to the start of the event and you already have a seat, be aware that the Rio will not buy the chips from you should you win a seat and you might have to scramble around to sell them. You should factor this into your decision as to whether to play.

The house take from megas comes from an entry fee added on to the buy-in. For example, a \$300 mega has a \$30 entry fee that goes directly to the house, in addition to the 3% withheld for staff.

### **Off-site satellites**

There are many opportunities to play satellites for the ME outside of the Rio. B&M poker rooms around the world offer satellites of one form or another, and online poker sites are a rich source of ME participants. For the most part these outside venues aren't associated with Harrah's or the Rio and have their own structure and rules.

### **B & M rooms**

The ways B&M poker rooms can qualify their players for ME seats is limited only by the imagination of their management. If you have a room you patronize find out if and how they approach it and decide if it works for you.

### **Online poker sites**

The heaviest fallout from Black Friday, as far as the WSOP is concerned, will be from the lack of American internet qualifiers from online satellites. After the passing of the UIGEA in 2006, Harrahs was no longer able to accept direct buy-ins from the sites. This meant satellite winners had the funds put in their accounts and then could decide whether or not to play. But the solid numbers in the years since 2006 indicate that many chose to play. The lack of the online satellite option for Americans will surely have an effect on turnouts, the question being how much.

## **CASH GAMES**

The WSOP draws legions of poker players from around the world. Many bypass the tournaments and focus strictly on cash games, which are some of the best of the year. Most play a combination of cash and tournaments. In the first few years the WSOP was held at the Rio a lot of the biggest cash games were held at other card rooms, notably the

Bellagio, where cash players played during the rest of the year and felt more comfortable. While the Bellagio still has strong action, in the past couple years the cash-game action at the Rio has picked up. Other rooms around Vegas benefit from the WSOP also, as business increases across the board.

A big Pot-Limit Omaha game is a staple at the Rio, populated by a lot of the new-generation players who have adopted the game. Omaha Eight-or-Better players are there in force, with \$75-150, and occasionally higher games going pretty much round the clock and often on multiple tables. There's also a wide variety of NLH games, starting at \$1-3 blinds and going as high as players want to play. The menu of games includes just about anything that attracts enough players to fill a table. Also, Chinese Poker has been in past years.

The cash-game section in 2011, as in 2010, will be in a section of the huge Pavilion Room. There will be multiple "boards" in the area, which list the games offered in that section of the room. Under each game is the list of players waiting to get in the game. Find the board that lists the game or games you want to play and have the floor person running that board put you on the list. You should stay in the area and listen for your name to be called. You can see on the board your place on the list and get an idea of how long you'll have to wait. You can get on more than one list.

The first and last weeks of the WSOP are generally the busiest. At the beginning is when there's the most loose cash around. As the lesser-skilled players lose their bankrolls things tighten up a bit. The first week is also when there are the longest waiting lists, so be prepared. If you're generous in tipping the board person, you can probably give him your room number or cell number and he'll let you know when your seat opens. Once you're seated at a game a chip runner will come by to get you chips to play with. It's possible another player, who's leaving the game or just has too many chips, might offer to sell you chips. There's no problem buying from another player, but it's a private transaction and management won't get involved if there's a problem. Cash plays, but only \$100 bills.

If you get seated in a stud-type game, simply put up your ante when the next hand is starting and you're on your way. If it's a flop game, you enter the game by posting a blind. You can either wait for the big blind obligation to reach your seat, or "post behind the button", which means you can wait until the button passes your seat, then post just the amount of the big blind, which will be "live" and you will act in turn. You don't have to be directly behind the button to post, you can do it in any seat. However, once the blind obligation subsequently reaches your seat, you'll have to post in turn.

If you want to take a break, you'll have a time limit as to how long you can be away. If you miss a blind you get a missed-blind button. You'll get an absent button whenever a new dealer sits down and you have a missed blind button. If you have a missed blind and two absent buttons you are subject to being "picked up", meaning your chips will be picked up by a floor person and taken to a place for safe keeping. If you notify a floor person that you're going for an extended time, such as to dinner, and might not make it

back in time, he might extend your allowed time away. If you're away from the table excessively, even though you might not have two absent buttons, you could be picked up. If you're picked up, where you're placed on the game list when you return is a floor decision, although generally you're put on top of the list.

When you return to the table, if it's a flop game you'll have to post a blind before you can resume playing. Again you have a choice to either wait for the big blind to reach your seat, or post behind, but this time you'll have to post both blinds, not just the big, with the small blind being put in the pot as dead money.

If you want to change to a different seat at the game you're in, you should inform the dealer as well as the rest of the players of your intention. If you say, "I want the first seat change", you have that option unless another player has made the request ahead of you. In that case you'll be on the list for a change in the order of who asked. Some card rooms use a seniority system, but the WSOP does not. When you change seats, if you move more than two seats away from the blinds you can either post the blind, or wait until you're in the same position as you were when you moved, to be dealt in.

If you want to go to a different game at a different limit, get on the list and the board person will call you in turn. If you want to go to a different game of the same limit, tell the board which game you want to go to and he'll put you on the "change list". When you're called for your table change, whether for a different or the same limit game, in a flop game you must move immediately, except you're entitled to play your button if you've already taken a blind. In a stud game you must move when not in a hand. When you get to your new game you'll be treated like a new player, with the blind obligations that go with it.

When a new game is started at a limit where there are a game or games already going, it will usually be designated a "must-move" game. This means that game is essentially a "feeder-game" into the existing games. A list will be formed, usually starting with the first player who was on the waiting list, and players will be moved from the must-move game as seats open in the main game. If you're moved to the main game, you must move immediately unless you're the small blind or the button. When you get to the main game, you can wait for the most advantageous position, other than the button, and will be dealt in without being required to post.

For a full treatment of poker rules, go to:  
<http://www.lasvegasvegas.com/poker/rpprinter.php>

When you're ready to quit playing, there's a cashier in the area to handle the cash players.

## CONCLUSION

The WSOP has come a long way in a relatively short time. What started out as a small gathering of “road gamblers” has morphed into an international spectacle. The 2011 version will face some challenges:

### **“It’s the economy, stupid.”**

I was amazed at the turnout at the WSOP in the years since the economy went into freefall. In spite of one of the worst economic downturns in decades, the poker economy seemed strong as the Rio hosted full fields in tournaments and satellites and a robust cash-game menu. Entering the 2011 WSOP, while the U.S. economy is showing some signs of a recovery, there are still many people struggling and there’s a question of how much disposable income is available to be injected into the poker economy.

### **The Black Friday fallout**

This is obviously the biggest challenge to poker at present, and likely far into the future. Whether and when online poker will be legalized in the U.S. is a great unknown. I think poker is firmly enough bedded in the mainstream that it won’t shrink back to pre-2003 levels. The consensus is that live poker will benefit greatly, and that online players will flock to the B&M poker rooms, including the WSOP. I tend to agree, because there were such great numbers of players who enjoyed the game online and will search out other outlets. The WSOP is the apex of the poker world, so it should be a good barometer of the future of poker in the U.S.

### **Going forward**

While the modern version of the WSOP is far different from the original gathering, it remains the granddaddy of poker tournaments and the highlight of nearly every poker player’s year. It’s where new players make their bones and veterans solidify their reputations. I still feel the excitement and sense of anticipation as it draws near, as I have every year since I started attending.

I think the WSOP’s transition from the small, family-owned Binion’s to the big corporate world of Harrah’s was awkward for everybody involved. Modern corporations have a responsibility to stockholders first, and it took a while for Harrah’s to come to a balance, greatly aided by Jeffrey Pollack’s efforts, between the bottom line and player’s needs and desires. I think Ty Stewart, Jack Effel and the rest of the management team is dedicated to making the WSOP as successful as possible for management and players alike. Regardless of current challenges, I’m confident the World Series of Poker will continue to be the standard in poker tournaments for many years to come.

I will continue to enjoy my WSOP experience, and I feel very excited and positive about my chances for success this year. I hope this guide will help you enjoy your WSOP experience ,and good luck at the tables!