

Women venturing in to the poker den

Poker traditionally conjures up images of stoney-faced men sat solemnly sitting around tables, supping brandy in smoke-filled rooms. The reality, however, is somewhat different. Here Kate Nelson takes a look at the latest converts to this increasingly popular pastime – women...

Later this year Birmingham will bear witness to a gambling first.

Britain's largest casino, Star City, will host the UK's first live women-only poker tournament.

And with prize money of GBP 100,000 up for grabs, there will be no shortage of competitors.

Which may come as a surprise to many for poker has customarily been the bastion of the male of the species, be it students playing for bottle tops or high rollers playing for the shirts on their backs.

In recent times the popularity of poker has mushroomed as casinos benefit from the increased exposure that has come from the online gaming and televised tournaments.

And according to Mark Ross, manager at Star City, it was just a matter of time before women got in on the act.

„We've only been holding poker here for the past seven months, and every week more and more people are coming," he said.

„The beginner's night attracts a lot of women of all ages and backgrounds. It's as though poker is a new craze, but it's not. It's being revitalized.

„Some of the women were playing other games at the casino and

fancied the look of poker. Others had seen it on TV or played at home with friends. And of course online gaming is a big part of it.“

The event at Star City will see women from across the country competing in the final following a series of satellite tournaments taking place nationwide from June 12.

„This is going to be a huge event, the likelihood is that it will be televised and we’re the only casino large enough to cater for that,“ said Mark.

And the women who do make it to the finals may be surprised at the chosen venue as Mr Ross believes Star City is long way from the traditional view of a ‚poker den‘.

„Poker has probably suffered from having a slightly seedy reputation but it’s not a fair representation,“ he said.

„You can see for yourself what it’s like here. It’s a big bright room, we’ve got bars and restaurants – it’s a multi-leisure environment.

We have dealers on every table to make sure play is fair.

„I think the men like having the women here, it all adds to the banter at the table.

„The women sit there quietly confident, but the men are much more cocky.

„The men might be shocked when a woman wins, but they would never admit it. Poker is a completely level playing field, it’s just women haven’t been playing as long. “

Nicky Clements, general manger at Star City, said the venue had hosted a series of mixed tournaments in the past although the women-only tournament hadn’t come out of any real necessity.

She said: „I don't think the women players feel they need a separate tournament – the concept of a women's game appealed because it's never been done here, but it's popular in America.

„We had a woman here who played against thirty men and by her own skill and luck she beat them all.“

She added „Poker is so widely available now. You only have to walk in to W H Smith and you can get about twenty magazines dedicated to poker. There are tips online and on TV, as well as a multitude of books. Everybody knows someone who plays.“