

# WPT – Bellagio Five Diamond World Poker Classic – Trip Report

**Monday, May 27, 2002**

The tournament starts a little late with a total of 146 players. Tournament Buy in is 10,000,- USD plus 200,- USD vig. Almost no dead money.

Most tournament regulars and some Bellagio High Stakes Players. Quite a field. I won my seat in a combination of satellites (cashed in 2 out of 4) and some profits in 30/60 HE. My goal is to survive the first day and possibly double up once. Nothing spectacular

happens and at the end of day one we are down to 100 players with chips from 102'150 (Sammy Arzoin) to 3,025,- USD (Phil Helmuth). I am in 6th position with 30,250,- USD. During the first break after 1 level we are all (including one guest each) invited to the First Class Bellagio Buffet. What a change from the WSOP.

**Tuesday, May 28, 2002**

I like my table. The player to worry about is Jeff Shulman with 32,050,- USD but he is to my immediate right. Paul Phillips is at my table also. He thinks he is short, so he moves in several times.

The last time, when I raised with KK and he moved in with QJ. I gladly call. No help for him. I have to change tables several times. I feel very comfortable and collect a lot of chips without putting my stack in jeopardy at any time. After playing only three

levels, we are down to 36 players and stop playing for the day. I have moved up to 5th chip position (152,100,- USD). Interesting note. The 5 top players after day two were also

the 5 top finishers at the end but in different order.

### **Wednesday, May 29, 2002**

I draw table 11 for the third day. I am the chip leader at my table. The dangerous players Amir Vahedi (109,600,- USD) and Mike Sukonik (99,300,- USD) are both to my right. I get lucky early, when I steal with QJ. BB calls and check-calls me on flop and turn on a Q high board. I know I need help and river a lovely J and take 80% of unlucky Roger McDow. I have another good day and can move my chips nicely.

We play less than 4 hours to get down to the money (18 players) I m very happy with the result of the day and end up in 3rd chip position with 374'000. The 5 top players after day three are still the same.

### **Thursday, May 30, 2002**

The draw for could not be worse for me. 6 out of the 7 largest stacks are at the same table and the worst of it, they are all to my immediate left. I draw seat 8. John Hennigan (609,900,- USD) is in seat 9, the very aggressive Gus Hansen (313,700,- USD) in seat 1 and Freddy Deeb (445,000,- USD) in seat 2. To my immediate right is Amir Vahedi with 118,600,- USD. I know, I have to find hands to play, with these mountains of chips to my left. Unfortunately I find very few playable hands and my stack gets smaller and smaller.

At the 11th level (1K ante, 2K/4K blinds) the following key hand happens. I limp in middle position with Presto (55) – 4-way action.

Flop comes Q74 (two hearts). It is checked around. Turn is a 5. Early position bets, Amir goes all in for 51K. I have a decision to make. (I have 275,000,- USD chips). Behind me is Gus Hansen still in the pot with more than 500K. I have two options. Call the 51K or raise.

I am confident, I have Amir beaten, but I have no idea what Gus has. He was playing 50% of all hands and could have anything. I decide to go the more conservative way and smooth

call the 51K. Now comes Gus Hansen and raises another 109,000,- USD. Does he have the str8? Just two pair? A bigger set is not possible, since he would have raised pre flop with a pair. A flush draw was also possible, since he played draws also very aggressively. I decide to fold my set and stay in the tournament. I really wanted to go to the final table with all the TV, etc. It turns out, that Gus had slow played top two on the flop. No change on the river. I would have won the hand and would have been the chip leader, but I still think my decision was correct. This hand was discussed at length in the tournament area. I have to admit, that the WPT TV show had influenced my game at least in this hand. In a normal tournament, I would probably have reraised and called a re-re-raise all in.

At the other table John Juanda and Scotty Nguyen did a fine job in building up chips and made the final table with good chip positions. The final table was played down to 6 players. I could not find a hand any more and got basically blinded off, but made

the final 6, although in 6th chip position (136,000,- USD).

### **Friday, May 31, 2002 – Being a film star**

The final six players have been given a 6-page Production Packet with Production Schedule for the day and Saturday together with a lot of information – very professional. At 11am we met at the Poker-Room with Bellagio Director of Poker Operations Doug Dalton and his lovely wife Edna together with the beautiful hostess Shana.

They took us with a Limo to Mastroianni Fashions, where we all purchased new suits, shirts, and whatever. Everything took a little longer, since we were accompanied by a filming crew. So entering and leaving the limo, entering and leaving the shop as well as selecting cloth was all taped. Quite a new experience. We then went back to the Bellagio, of course again shot on tape, including Scotty's never ending jokes – funny. In the afternoon every final table player was interviewed for

about half an hour. While I was sitting at the make-up desk (yes – everything is done very professionally) I saw the impressive setup for the final table. In the center of Bellagio Ballroom 1 they were setting up a full stage with lights, computers, cameras, etc. etc. About 30 (thirty) people were working on the set. In the evening we all went to dinner together with the management at the Patio. It was very nice. At 10.30pm a storm came off and blue everything away. I went to bed early to prepare for the final on Saturday.

### **Saturday, June 1, 2002 – The TV show**

After breakfast at the poolside cafe, I was called on stage at noon, two hours before the start of the show. We sat down at the new table and were instructed how to hold our down cards, so the mini-cameras in front of each of us could see the cards. We were

assured, that the taping of the hole cards was done in a separate room and the technician in charge would not leave that room before the tournament was over and had to keep all information confidential. Gaming Commission was also there to make sure, everything was fine. The final table was taped for Word Poker Tour (WPT) wich will be aired after the football season early 2003, possibly as early as already this fall. The setup was spescially made for the WPT. The lights, cameras, hostesses, etc were a little different than usual, but not distracting at all. Since the hole cards (of the hands shown only) will be seen when aired, some people might think, that this might change someones game. It did not change my game, but I am sure, that at least one player at the final table had changed his game, at least for some time.

Play started a little late at 2.30. We had still 24 minutes left at 1K ante and 3k/6k blinds. Being the sort stack, I had my plan, which worked pretty well for quite some time. During the second round I picked up a big hand and moved in, but got no call. I played very solid and got involved very little, while the chips were flying between some of the other players.

During the 13th level (2K ante, 5K/10K blinds) I reraised with QQ, got called by the original raiser, Freddy Deeb with TT and doubled up. An hour later I had the QQ again. This time I moved in with it and John Hennigan called with AQ and I doubled up again. I had no chance to steal blinds, since the big stacks would call me anyway, but my doubling up twice kept me in good shape and I built up my stack to 300K, when early in the 14th level (2K ante, blinds 10K/20K) the last hand for me came up. I had already survived for several hours.

Since I was the short stack most of the time, my blinds were always raised. This hand was the first for several hours, when my blind was NOT raised. John and Gus both just limped and I could see a free flop, and what a flop. I had 7d4d. Flop comes 974, two spades. I decided to try to win a nice pot here and checked, knowing, that one of these two aggressive players would bet for me. John made it 45K to go and Gus called the 45K. Since there was a flush draw on board, I decided to checkraise all in for 300K. John said his typical „I call“, which I liked, but then came Gus and said „ALL IN“ for more than one million. John immediately folded. Showdown: Bottom two for me, but TOP TWO for Gus. Bad luck. With only two outs I was drawing pretty slim. Gus won that nice 650K pot and went right to win the tournament from there, while I had my last interview with charming Shana and cashed my \$ 62'604. I felt pretty sad. I had played great poker for 5 days. On the final table I had shown only premium hands and built up my stack nicely, but got a little unlucky at the end.

This event was really a major change in poker and the start of a complete new area. Everything was just classy and very professional. Thanks to Lyle Berman and Steve Lipscomb for providing the poker world with such an exciting event – and thank lady luck for having me being part of it and congratulations to Gus for his first place finish.

I have talked with Audrey D. Kania, Senior Vice President of WPT, a very competent and nice person, btw. She said, that the

big networks have already contacted them, which means a lot.  
It looks,like poker would get on mainstream TV pretty soon.