

End of Day Two – This is when it all gets good. – WSOP 2003



Well, well. They fell like flies on Day 2 of the World Series of Poker, slashing the field down from 384 players to 111 big hearts with their eyes on the prize. Actually, there are only some of them with their eyes on the prize. A good chunk of the 111 players left in this tournament are lying in bed as I write, eyes wide open and tossing and turning, with the same two thoughts going over and over in their heads. The first thought, „Why can't I get to sleep?“ And the second thought, „I just want to hold on for fifty more places, get dealt an ace-queen and be allowed to go home.“ Because in your wildest dreams, you could never imagine how lonely it must be to be lying awake in bed with a whole stack of chips after Day 2 of the World Series of Poker.

That is why, with all due respect to those who have had fun so far, those players that found their nerve to come over the top with no hand when their instincts told them the play was proper, the guys who said to themselves after winning a monster pot on Day 2, „How hard can this be?“, all those fellows are just beginning to experience what's special about a five day tournament. It's not just five days of poker. It's a 120 hour dream that you can't wake up from, something that started as a barrel of laughs until the walls began to move, when the smile on your neighbor's face starts haunting you like a white faced clown, cackling over and over in your brain when he moved in on you for all your stack and you started

trembling with the two queens. Day 3 of the World Series of Poker is when laughter turns to pain. And there are 70 guys with rings around their eyes who are just discovering that rude awakening, they have to ask themselves one very important question. Do I really have what it takes?

I like the guys who have been there before. I always do. I like every player who has blown out once before on Day 4 or Day 5 and had the benefit of years to think about it. Lessons at this most special of all poker tournaments can only be learned the hard way, and it takes several years of pain before you're ready to step to the plate again.

Look at Jeff Shulman. Chip leader at the 2000 World Series of Poker when they were only nine remaining, and he busted out in seventh place. Did he cry about it, no. He was guilty of being a 25 year old kid who was so excited that he tried to win the WSOP on Day 4, and if it wasn't for Jim McManus' recent book, a lot of people wouldn't even know how it happened. Shulman didn't kiss and tell, he didn't spend two years sunk below his beer telling hard luck stories to himself and the barman, he mulled and he waited. And now he's back in a solid position, three years later with 100,000 in chips and so much the wiser. This is a guy who's ready to win. Annie Duke, same story. She held herself together on a volatile Day 2, bereft of the suckers who just keep giving her money because they figure a woman can't call, and she's looking to improve on her top fifteen finish of a few years ago that gave her a lifetime of experience in how to jig the big dance. Former champions can't be ignored, guys like Scotty Nguyen and the always underrated Dan Harrington. They're sleeping like babies, the sleep of the what lies ahead.

This doesn't mean that you should write off every no name, the poker world is big and there are some players who have a big advantage this year in that no one knows that they're capable. Final tables are not only where champions meet, it's where they are made, and they'll always be a few youngsters who have

more courage in their little finger than thirty years worth of practice could ever give anyone. Very few folks know about the Norwegian Odd Erlund, but his name will likely be in lights for years to come. He spent part of Day 2 on the left of Amarillo Slim, one of the greatest players in the short history of Internet poker reraising a man who was great before the Internet was born. Odd Erlund's got game, and a whole lot of poise. My pick is the red headed wonder, young Rory Liffey, who has got that pedigree that every No Limit Hold'em player dreams of in that he's Irish. Rory is also a European cash game player of no small repute, and the boys back home know that if you give him too much respect he'll rob you blind. Late in Day 2 he had 60,000 and was taken aside, the wise minders with reassuring words said hey Rory, you got enough for tomorrow, don't be scared of settling down for the last two hours. „Well, Rory said, that's fair enough but I think I'll just kick on instead.“ And with 91,300 in chips and the bottle to boot, Liffey could back into the final table without ever showing a hand.

There was some tough tables on Day 2 of the World Series of Poker. In an 800 player tournament the luck of the cards pales in comparison to the luck of the draw, and you wouldn't wish on your worst enemy what happened to Surinder Sunar on Day 1, when he played for eleven hours straight with same eight players, he said it was like a super satellite where they're giving away eight seats. Meanwhile, at the next table over all you could hear was, „Seat open. Seat open!“. It's tough to accumulate when there's no chips on the table.

Julian Gardner sitting at a Day 2 table with the fearsome Paul Darden, and to the left of Johnny Chan. To his right was John Inishima, and a short stacked David Sklansky. Actually, for Sklansky anything over six thousand is three hours of antes. It must be lovely to sit on the left on David Sklansky. Paul Darden is the one they call the real deal, wearing a slick pair of silver winged glasses and a T-shirt that reads, Rules

of the Game. Darden has a steady gaze, dark eyes and an intense expression, 600 becomes 2200 before Sklansky reraises all in for 5000 more. Sklansky is biting his nails, flipping his nose, and he takes his glasses on and off once as he looks away. Darden just freezes, immobile with his 70,000 and staring down, but you have to imagine he's just feeling, feeling to his left. Paul Darden folds.

Lyle Berman has to have the second biggest mouth in poker. He had chirping chips all day long, meaning he got a hold of some chips and just started chirping. He's spitting out nothings, a waah waah waah, usually the way people act when they know they're going off their cheese. A backwards baseball cap stubble mouthed gangler wearing a Pokerstars t-shirt and playing like he's in an Internet chatroom is ranting right back. And with both ears ringing and sitting between the two of them is pretty boy Carlo Citrone, who had the clock called on him three times today. And that was without any chips in the pot.

Day 3 won't be nearly so fast. The play will halt to a grind when entrants start smelling the money, and it'll be the stars with the muscle and the courage who are open for business when everyone else shuts down who will make it to the final forty-five of the World Series of Poker. Me? I'm gonna have some bacon and eggs and get a place on the rail. This is when it all gets good.