

# End of Day Three – WSOP 2003



I was on my fifth beer at the Golden Gate coffee shop when an Irishman came running in with the sheets. And I had to kick myself for missing the last hour and a half of Day 3 of the WSOP, when the world turned upside down. I thought all the excitement would happen early in the day, when the pressure was on, but I guess I was wrong. Because from the money tables down to 45 players, when the nailbiters opened up and tried to get up or go, the leaderboard took so many surprising twists and turns that they might as well have been playing on a blanket with a pair of dice. The final Day 3 leaderboard is no indication of how Day 3 went, and I have to wonder if some of the players didn't temporarily leave their seats and invite the audience to play.

To win the World Series you have to do the least obvious, open it up when the pressure is on, and play tight as a drum when the wheels start to spin. And that's why I separate the leaders into two groups, those who amassed their chips before they hit the money, and those who went nuts when the pressure was off. Because early in the day you could steal without showing a hand, and those who were courageous slowly climbed up the board. But once 63 players were left, 15,000 USD was guaranteed all around, and there was 30 or more who wanted to get rich or go home. They didn't fancy trying to stick around without any chips, so the last two hours of play were one massive free for all. My feeling is that those guys are the ones whose chips are for sale, they'll come into Day 4 and

shut up their shop. They'll have had all night to think about how lucky they got, and will bleed off their stack like slow dripping leaks. Day 4 will be a major separator, and the pressure will be back and luck less a factor. Bruno Fitoussi is the World Series chip leader, but he was rocky all day like a flash in the pan. Bruno amassed his chips in some giant late swoops, and I have to believe he's still a dog for the final. Sammy Farha same story, he plays like a seesaw, calling and raising and seeing the turn.

Paul Darden is the second shortest stack in the tournament. What's likely to happen is that he'll bust out quickly and never get his due. Never get credit for one of the most inspiring Day 3's that I've ever seen. Darden recovered from a short stack early in the morning with a massive run. And as they neared end of play he was far to the front. But after getting all the money in with an hour to go and a set of tens on the flop, Darden had to watch as a king hit the river and took all his chips, leaving him with only ten thousand. Now Darden had every right to stick the 10,000 in on the very next hand, just as an afterthought to a World Series disaster. But to his immense credit he hung on and finished the day with 17,000. Darden's got both types of game, and is down but not out.

Some players were steady all day and I see them in the final, staying out of danger and picking up chips. I'll pick nine just for fun, the ones who look good, the ones who played well every step of the way. Scotty Nguyen, Phil Hellmuth, Jeff Shulman, Humberto Brenes, Dan Harrington, Marcel Luske, Men Nguyen, Kevin Song, and of course Phil Ivey. I'm sure I'm just dreaming, it never could happen, but enough superstars are left so that one thing is for sure. The final table of the 2003 World Series of Poker has every chance to be the best one in history. Every chance in the world.

I might as well as give out some Day 3 extras, for junkies only: Twenty minutes in and Paul Darden's raised Howard

Lederer 26 thousand more and all in before the flop. Howard thinks for a God awful time before calling. Ace-queen of diamonds for Darden, ace-seven of spades for Howard, and with a flush on the turn, Darden doubles right through and in position to make things oh so tough for Lederer, who sighs and stares into space for a full five minutes after the hand. Ten minutes later and Howard is still going over it in his head, chin in his hands and gaze fixed towards the center. It's 12:30 pm and Paul Darden is suddenly healthy. Not twenty minutes after and Darden has darn near busted the table, his two short stacks have given way to gardens of gold. The money places are coming up plus they're on the TV table, so Darden takes advantage while the rest of them freeze like an ice storm. It's 1:15 pm and Darden has gone from shortstack to tournament favorite. He's over 120,000.

Table 74 has a lot of Europeans. Pepe Klinger in seat 1, Rory Liffey in 3, and Marcel Luske opens up for 3600 from seat number 6. Elvis Sr. Atkinson in 7 raises up to 9000 straight and Marcel thinks not too long before showing an ace and folding up shop. Elvis says, „I'll show you one,“ and flips up the ladies. Marcel breaks into song. With the upside down sunglasses he may be the most relaxed guy in the tourney, certainly at the table. He's all smiles. Pepe, who's been to this stage of the big one once before is just focused, but a bit short stacked in the thirty grand range. Mark Gregorich in seat 2 makes it five thousand one off the button, and Irishman Liffey is having not a bit of it. „Fifteen,“ he says, snaking three stacks down. Your man in late position folds up shop quickly, and the Irishman sips his water out of danger with the well timed second raise.

Jeff Shulman in form with a whole bunch of no names, in very good spirits. The man on his left raises and then looks at Jeff, who's staring at him hard while out of the hand. Your man is nervous as a hen pecker flitting this way and that while the decision is on his left. He looks at Jeff again,

who's eating into him with a scary stare. „I wouldn't look at me if I were you," says Jeff, „the action's over there!" I do believe the intimidation play is working if that's his intention. Shulman sees a chance to dominate this table, and he's lean and mean. One pm and twelve tables to go. Seven tables to be paid, and 45 get nothing. Which forty-five get nothing is the question of the day, but the ones who open up now and tighten up later are the guy's who know they'll be in position to go for the final table on Day number 4. It's near to the break and Jeff has padded up to 160,000 without any danger.

Back at the European table, Marcel is still moving like clockwork, padding his lead and raising seven out of ten, always in with the first raise before the flop. Here comes Pepe with a raise to six thousand and it's Rory again from the small blind as he thwunks to a total of 18 straight. Meanwhile, Ladbrokes entrant Pre is in the middle of the table drying up like a desert. Shrinking and shrinking, that 15,000 USD payout sounds good to him, and I think he's realized the fun is over as he goes into his shell. Too much too soon, this year will be a valuable lesson, but I can't see him making it out of Day 3 alive. Rory has finally found his voice, he's settled right in, he says to Marcel, „We're just waiting ffor you to keep quiet, but I don't believe it'll happen today.“ „By any chance are you Irish?" says Marcel with a laugh. He can afford to laugh, he has over 200,000.

Lyle Berman raises 4,000 from the button and Phil Ivey just calls from the big blind. Flop comes A-k-9, check-check. Ivey leads out when an 8 hits the turn, and Berman comes all in for about 40,000 more. Ivey calls and flips over the 8-9 offsuit, while Lyle was slowplaying his ace-jack. He tried to get fancy against Phil Ivey, and Phil just flat busted him. Not every trapper is a loud mouth fool wearing a fur hat. And Berman can go home and tell everyone for the next five years that Ivey called him with the 8-9 offsuit. 1:25 pm and Odd Erlund moves

into the one seat at Phil's table with about 100,000. Phil just has masses. And Amir Vahedi, with a big fat cigar, moves into Berman's seat with over 200,000, two seats to Phil's right. Phil is just gazing in at Amir. Tough table? Rgp'er Jonathon Kaplan has every right to vomit all over, but he's raising from the two hole instead, 1600 becomes 5600. It's Amir's first hand and he's setting up his chips, he says, „20,000 more. I came to gamble.“ Call, motions Kaplan, and then with his hand still in the center he waves the other one while saying, „I'm going all in.“ Baseball cap and sunglasses, chewing his gum. Faster and faster, he looks nervous but I think he's trying to look nervous, he's just stuck in his 90,000 stack. Amir is taking no shortage of time, and now they're exchanging words. „Where you from, buddy?“ says Amir, before flipping up the big laydown, queens going in the muck.

Back from the break, and Annie Duke has battened the hatches. She's down to about 50,000 and is playing two long stacks. But she has Humberto Brenes as a hoover three seats to her right, he's got sunglasses up high on his eyes and prescription lenses low on his nose. And with a red kerchief around his neck, which must be for luck, I mean it's the worst darned color combo I ever have seen, the Costa Rican is comfortable. „Do you know who I am?“ Is his trademark line in an accented lilt. „I'm Humberto!“ Next hand Humberto makes it 6 grand to go one off the button. A shortstacked redshirter comes over the top all in for 40,000. Humberto ain't doing nothing anytime soon. He fiddles, faddles, and looks at your man before giving him a moustachioed smile and laying them down.

Dan Harrington at the corner table with his hat down low. A former world champion exactly where he likes to be. Out of the spotlight and thinking about the money. It's said that about twenty years ago Harrington was a good young player, and then he met Ray Zee. Ray Zee, the Bobby Fisher of poker, the trout fishing oddball with more secrets than the royal family. He and Harrington became tight as two clams, and the rest is

history. Most people see an older gentleman with a slightly dazed look, and don't realize Harrington is oh so capable. Dan's sitting to the left of New York supergamer and nice guy, Jason Lester. Dan takes Lester off the pot after a jack high flop, and Lester mutters to Dan after folding his hand. Respect. Guys in the know give Dan Harrington respect, everybody else just wonders. Harrington is dressed like a green billboard, I wish I knew why.

Blinds are one thousand and two, and Lester has raised his third pot in a row, up scope to 6500. Called in the big blind by a grey wearing shorter stack. Ace high flop, and it's Lester to act. 14,000, he says, and rakes the chips in.

Harrington opens for seven thousand in middle position, flat called in the small blind. J-5-2 with two clubs is the flop, checked to Dan who fires ten thousand again called by the blind. Turn pairs the board and after a check-check the six of clubs hits the river. Check yet again, and Dan splashes four orange chips, 20,000 straight, which is called by your man after an interminable time. Harrington shows the ace-four of clubs for an ace high flush. Now Harrington sticks a small needle in, telling the guy, „I thought you were gonna raise on the flop.“ The fellow says nothing, just swallows hard and looks like he wants to sink in the earth. But you can't run check-call against Dan the man Harrington.

It's 3:09 pm and Julian Gardner gives a yawn. He's got 89,000 and sits in the middle of the table drinking from a large bottle of green tea. His sunglasses are off and folded in his shirt. He yawns again. It's Julian vs. Ivey, there's three hearts to a 7-6-3-9 board and with about 30,000 already in the pot Julian leads out for a stack of blue, 20 thousand more. Ivey asks for a countdown and finds he covers Gardner easily, Julian has about seventy thousand back, Ivey has all that plus about seventy thousand more. He's thinking intense, shuffling chips, and then and then, throws it away. Julian says nothing, and just stacks them up.

written by Jess May