

Poker ace sent to jail

One of the world's top poker players was jailed for two years at Teesside Crown Court after he lost a high stakes gamble with Customs.

Carlo Citrone ranked 18th best player in the world, smuggled 2.7 million cigarettes into the UK while he was playing at a tournament in Vienna, Austria.

The container load was intercepted at Southampton docks.

Citrone, 38, seventh in the last world championships and the champion in Austria and Australia, booked the shipment under the name George Hughes.

He had 76 phone chats between January and March 2002 with haulier pal William Howard, 41, in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, where it was delivered.

He claimed that Hughes was a poker player he met in a casino who said he was moving to the North-east of England, but that was a sham, said John Carroll prosecuting for Customs and Excise.

Citrone, son of former Mr Universe muscleman John Citrone, said that the calls to Howard were about gym equipment.

He told a jury at Teesside Crown that he needed to keep fit because he played for 58 hours in one game.

Citrone was regarded as one of the rising stars of the poker world and appeared in three TV documentaries. He played poker every day in casinos or documentaries.

Citrone, of Warren Lea, Springwell Village, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, was found guilty of being knowingly concerned in the evasion of 430,587 GBP duty with Howard, of Northside Close, Middridge, Shildon, County Durham.

Howard was jailed for 12 months. Judge George Moorhouse told them after their nine-day trial: „You both know with your experience of life that people who commit offences of this kind commit very serious offences which justify immediate custodial sentences.“

The cigarettes will be destroyed and Customs are now seeking seizure of their homes and businesses by confiscation orders.