

# **Erick Lindgren A Young Superstar won the Poker Cruise Million**

When he awoke on the cruise ship, Erick Lindgren was slow to remember the events of the previous day. Then, he looked on the nightstand, shook his head, and started laughing and mumbling to himself. There on the nightstand was a USD 22,000 bar tab from the night before!

He had literally stayed up the entire night to party with friends – a ship full of them!

In one fell swoop, the entire evening came back to him. After winning USD 1 million, he wanted everyone to celebrate his victory; he bought drinks for every person in the Crow's Nest Bar for one hour. The Crow's Nest isn't just any bar. It is a colossal bar on the top of Holland America's luxury cruise ship, the MS Ryndam. The room is dramatically enclosed by floor-to-ceiling windows, through which the lapping waves of the ocean can be observed.

Furthermore, this wasn't just any cruise; it was a poker cruise consisting of 546 players and roughly 750 companions, with the only non-poker related people on board being the ship's crew. All week long, PartyPoker.com and Card Player Cruises put on a fabulous event. Poker players from all over the world partied and enjoyed one another's company throughout the week. Mike Sexton called it „the world's greatest poker party.“ Unfortunately for Erick's pocket, it was quite the party where everyone knew one another and everyone wanted to join in the celebration; USD 22,000 buys lots of drinks, folks!

## **The Guy Everyone Likes**

Prior to our interview, I walked around the ship asking people

to tell me what they thought of Erick. I received the same answer no matter whom I asked. The consensus was that everyone liked Erick. He was described as a decent young man. He was portrayed as an exceedingly nice, fun, and easy-going guy. And let's not forget his generosity – USD 22,000 worth.

When I asked Erick why everyone likes him, he said it is probably because he loves people. He gets that from his mom, who also likes everyone. His mom was a kindergarten teacher, and is now retired and volunteering her time for good causes. Erick was born in the small town of Burney, California, where his dad owned three tire shops while he was growing up. His parents bought their house in 1968 and still live there. The town consists of 3,000 people, and everyone knows one another. Erick now lives in Las Vegas. When I asked him whether he misses the small town mentality, where everyone knows each other's business, he said: „Not really, but if I was raising a family, I would like to live in a smaller town.“

### **Single and Available**

This 27-year-old handsome youngster describes himself as very single.

„Aren't you looking?“ I asked him.

„Always,“ he said, grinning from ear to ear.

„What's your type?“ I probed.

„Someone who can put up with a gambler. I'll know it when I see it,“ he said with a boyish smile.

When I asked if he had a lot of fun on the trip, he said he had come to win the million. He was focused and did not even go ashore the entire trip. The fun did not begin for Erick until he won the million and began celebrating and celebrating and celebrating some more. Prior to that time, his entire focus was on preparing for the tournament.

### **The Job of Playing Poker**

One reason Erick has an edge is that he does not see poker as

a game. He sees it as a skilled job requiring preparation. He believes that it is to his advantage that poker is essentially treated like a lazy man's game. Many poker players just wake up and show up, without preparation, study, or insight into the game. On the other hand, Erick gets the proper rest, studies the game, and shows up primed. He studied Doyle Brunson's book Super/System, and when someone beats him, he purposely tries to play with that person to study his style and learn from it.

He brought DVDs on the cruise with poker footage, and watched them over and over again to learn different players' styles. He treats poker like a job, and he takes it very seriously. That is why he did not get off the ship. He practiced every day. He prepared himself physically, mentally, and emotionally. Erick considers the \$ 1 million payoff to be well worth all the hard work and preparation.

## Early Lessons



Erick played basketball in college, and explained that it didn't work out. „I sucked. I wasn't good enough.“ Then, he got a job at an Indian casino dealing blackjack. There was a poker room in the casino, and Erick started playing poker after his shift was over. He played USD 3 – USD 6 hold'em and stud. It was a trial and error process. He read books and copied the styles of the people who beat him.

When he turned 21, Erick took a job as a „prop“ at Casino San Pablo in the Bay Area. A prop is a player hired by the casino to make sure the games are full. The day before going to work

as a prop, he went broke in a USD 6 – USD 12 game. He lost his entire USD 600 bankroll. He was living in a Motel 6 and will never forget having to borrow money to go to work his first day.

He was a casino prop for almost two years. He remembers fondly the people with whom he worked. Todd Keikoan, Mazi Kazir, and Douglas Morgan were the other props at San Pablo who looked out for him.

They were professional, took him under their wing, and taught him about poker and life.

### **Playing Internet Poker**

Erick explained that he didn't start in big games or big tournaments. He played a lot of low-limit poker, both online and in cardrooms. Erick believes that both casinos and Internet play contributed to his success. The live play taught him how to read people, but his extensive Internet play taught him about the technical side of poker. He read „hand histories“ and studied the game. A „hand history“ is a play-by-play description of what occurred in an Internet poker hand, and is e-mailed to a player upon request.

We laughed out loud when Erick explained his Internet play. He bought three computers and played seven games at a time – seven games! I had to ask the obvious question: „What if you had to go to the bathroom?“ Most people play one or two games. How was it possible to concentrate on seven different games? You'll just have to ask him about his answer. I can't tell all of his secrets!

Erick's biggest online win was a whopping USD 50,000. I was in shock, and asked, „Are you sure?“

He just laughed and added, „My biggest win was about USD 50,000, but my biggest loss was close to USD 40,000.“ Gulp. Erick told me he plays online about 60 hours a week. He plays at least four games at all times, and explains that it feels like a boxing match. However, he sees himself as a student of the game, constantly thinking, analyzing, and honing his

skills. He can be found at PartyPoker.com using the name „Edawg.“

## **The Final Table**

The final table of the PartyPoker.com Million tournament looked like a who's who of poker with Barry Greenstein, Daniel Negreanu, Scotty Nguyen, Erick Lindgren, Steve Zolotow, and Chris Hinchcliffe. Seat positions and chip counts were as follows:

- 1 Steve Zolotow, USD 380,000
- 2 Scotty Nguyen, USD 310,000
- 3 Chris Hinchcliffe, USD 1,765,000
- 4 Barry Greenstein, USD 220,000
- 5 Daniel Negreanu, USD 560,000
- 6 Erick Lindgren, USD 595,000

Prior to the players taking their seats, there were enjoyable festivities, including James Woods being invited to the microphone. The MIT-trained star joked with the cheering crowd: „Well, you can all stop clapping and cheering for me now. I know what you're really thinking. Be nice to the sucker. Well, you've already busted me!“ The crowd roared. Shortly thereafter, the final six were invited to take their seats.

## **Chris Hinchcliffe**

Chris is a big man who works hard constructing natural gas pipelines in Olympia, Washington. He joined PartyPoker.com a few days before the online qualifying ended and won the cruise with his first \$ 25 attempt. He was thrilled to be there, and brought his brother along for support.

Prior to the taping, Chris told me with tears in his eyes that he had fallen on hard times and his mom had loaned him USD 10,000 instead of getting herself a new car, even though her old car overheated regularly. Making the final table will enable Chris to repay his mom. His plan is to buy his mom a

new car and splash the USD 10,000 on the front seat. It's hard not to root for a man like Chris, because he's all heart.

### **Barry Greenstein**

When Barry won the WPT tournament in Tunica, Mississippi, a few months ago, the world learned of his generosity, as he donates every penny of his winnings to charity. He doesn't even take out his buy-in or the taxes when he donates his winnings. To know Barry is to love the guy. His existence raises the philanthropic bar for all the rest of us. I think I showed proper journalistic restraint as I sat next to Barry's favorite person, Mimi Tran, and shrieked and cheered when his name was announced.

### **Scotty Nguyen**

Besides being a gentleman who always dresses like he just stepped out of GQ magazine, Scotty is an aggressive, well-liked player whose triumphs exceed most. In addition to winning USD 1 million, the coveted gold bracelet, and the main event at the World Series of Poker in 1998, Scotty's conquests include pot-limit Omaha at the 2001 WSOP, Omaha eight-or-better at the 1997 WSOP, two titles each from Foxwoods' World Poker Open, the Bicycle Casino's 2003 Legends of Poker, and the 2003 Festa al Lago at Bellagio. His successes are too many to recount.

### **Daniel Negreanu**

Daniel is one of the top tournament players in the world, with more than 25 victories under his belt. He and Erick live about five minutes from one another in Las Vegas. Daniel considers Erick to be one of his best friends, so once the tournament got down to Daniel and Erick, Daniel said it felt like a win-win situation for him. As important as winning is to Daniel, beating Erick would have been bittersweet.

### **Steve Zolotow**

Steve Zolotow has master's degrees in business and English, studied poetry, and worked as a financial consultant. Through the years, Steve's versatility has enabled him to support himself through a variety of gambling activities, including backgammon, sports betting, and poker. His wins include a WSOP bracelet for winning the 2001 pot-limit hold'em tournament, and being in the money many, many times.

## **Erick Lindgren**

Erick also won a seat to the PartyPoker tournament with a USD 25 buy-in. However, Erick was no stranger to tournament play and final tables. As a matter of fact, last year at the PartyPoker.com Million II, Erick placed seventh. Then, he went on to play and win a WPT event in Aruba, UltimateBet's 2003 Poker Classic II. Card Player Publisher Barry Shulman was also at that final table, and said Erick's play was fabulous.

## **Erick's Plan**

Erick ended day one with USD 13,000, day two with USD 197,000, and went to the final table with USD 595,000. He was in second place behind poker novice Chris Hinchcliffe, who had a commanding lead with USD 1,765,000. Erick's plan was to attack Steve Z. and Scotty. He knew Daniel would drive the action. He thought Barry would play great, as he always does, but added that Barry was a victim of a short stack and escalating blinds. Erick went in believing he had real good shot to win. He wanted people to get eliminated before getting too involved. He didn't want to tangle with Daniel early on.

Scotty fell, then Barry, followed by Steve. Chris was the novice, and when he took third, he was thrilled. As a matter of fact, prior to the final table, he told me his goal was to take third. Now it was left to two best friends and heads-up play. Both Erick and Daniel knew it was anyone's game.

In the final hand, Daniel had A-4 and Erick, A-3. The flop was 7h 5h 3club. Erick bet and Daniel moved all in. Moments later, Erick was the champion, winning the hand with a pair of

threes.

Erick's comment about that moment was, „When the film runs short, it's luck not skill.“

When I told Erick that Daniel had said a win would have been bittersweet, because it would have meant knocking out one of his best friends, Erick laughed and said, „Well, I wanted to kick Daniel's butt, and I'm sure he felt the same!“

### **A Fun 20-to-1 Bet**

I had been told confidentially about a private weight bet Erick had made with some folks, and decided to see whether he would be willing to talk about it. Erick is a fun guy, and laughed while nodding and explaining the bet. A while back, Phil Ivey bet Erick that at some point in Erick's lifetime, he would weigh 230 pounds. At the time of the bet, Erick weighed 210, but it seems that Phil noticed Erick's big appetite! It was a 20-to-1 bet, and Phil handed Erick USD 1,000, meaning that if Erick lost, it would cost him a whopping USD 20,000! Gee, whatever happened to the concept of a gentleman's bet?

Well, a year later Erick weighed 220 pounds, and Harley Hall wanted to get in on the action! So, Erick put another thousand in his pocket, betting Harley that he wouldn't ever reach 230 pounds. Now, there was USD 40,000 on the line.

„Are you nuts?“ I asked Erick in as complimentary a way as possible. It is obvious to the casual observer that Erick is a good-timer who really enjoys life.

He explained, „I have their two grand in my pocket and they're drawing dead. When I do something, I do it right. It took seven years of laziness to get this body. After the Reno tournament, I have plans to get a private trainer. Anyway, I will gamble on everything.“

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but when I ran into Erick in Reno, he looked pretty hot, and I don't think Phil and Harley have the best of this bet!

### **If You Could Change the World?**



When Erick woke up the morning after his win, he was immediately reminded of the USD 22,000 bar tab from the night before. It didn't hurt too much, because sitting next to the bar tab was a fabulous trophy, verifying his USD 1 million win. The memory of A-3 was a sweet one. He took his time getting up that morning, and only rolled out of bed in the afternoon so that he could be introduced to a cheering crowd at the PartyPoker farewell party. What a party it was!

After being gracious in our interview for a few hours while his friends were partying on the last night at sea, Erick glanced over at the clock on the wall. I knew he didn't want to miss the evening show, which included Daniel doing impressions of poker players. That promised to be pure enjoyment, and was not to be missed! I asked the delightful Erick one final question: „If you had a magic wand, how would you change the world?“

He pretended to contemplate with a furrowed brow, and then, looking very serious, he finally spoke. „I would change the USD 22,000 bar tab,“ he said, just before he burst out laughing.

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Quelle: Card Player