

Lucky Dog Poker: Unreported tales from Reno's World Poker Challenge

by Russ_Scott

Things happened during the just-completed \$100,000-added World Poker Challenge in Reno that you won't see reported anywhere else (thank goodness!). Here's a sampling:

“ I was introduced to poker superstar Jennifer Harman as "Russ Hamilton."

I know what you're thinking. It's an easy mix-up. After all, we have the same first name, and we both play poker. Actually, though, he won a World Series Championship bracelet in 1994, and I lasted four hours (twice) in WSOP 7-card stud events. Bummer.

On the other hand, I'm not currently in the center of a major online poker scandal “ although I did get disconnected once in a big online tournament and blamed evildoers at the poker Website for my misfortune.

When Kelli Griggs slipped up introducing me at a cocktail party the night before Jennifer's very successful charity tournament, I shrugged it off and laughed. Just in case, however, I also handed Jennifer my LuckyDog Poker business card and a small gift as a thank-you for an interview she granted me after her twins were born two years ago.

Kelli, a sales and marketing agent for GreasieWheels L.L.C., which produced the charity event, offered her apologies right away at the party and again later in an e-mail.

"I'm a poker player first and tour guide at cocktail parties second. I'm so sorry! I guess three days of no sleep is to blame," she said. No worries, I told her.

Kelli played her heart out the next two days in the WPC's \$3,000 highlight event and finished ninth “ the last woman standing “ for nearly \$7,500 against a strong 118-player field that included many pros and top amateurs.

Very impressive, Kelli. Now get some rest!

“ A quick "hello" to Vince Burgio, a 20-year pro with more than \$2 million in tournament winnings, turned into a friendly and fascinating 45-minute conversation away from the tournament area.

We shared the ups and downs of being poker columnists, compared notes on some favorite places to play and bemoaned the negative image cast on the game by the irresponsible behavior "often televised" of certain big-name players.

Then talk shifted to the recession's impact on poker.

"I don't know how long all of these \$10,000 buy-in tournaments can continue. You'd think the money would dry up," said Vince, who cashed twice at the WPC for \$13,000. We agreed that smaller buy-in events, like those at the WPC, should increase in popularity with the economy all messed up.

When the chat ended, Vince resumed course for the hotel's fitness center for a workout. I headed for a soft chair and a cold soda.

"While posting WPC results on my blog, I asked Vince Lepore of Las Vegas if the 'p' in his last name was capitalized. His answer caught me off-guard.

"I'm Italian, not French!" Okey-dokey, partner.

"In a chat with noted tournament director Jimmy Sommerfeld and Grand Sierra Resort's poker-room manager Charles Williams, I asked Charles about his recent return to work at the resort for a second time.

"Well, I took a year off to just play poker professionally," he said. Without thinking, I asked, "How'd that go?"

Jimmy broke into a big, knowing grin and said, "Now that's a story I'd really like to read!" Suspecting a land mine or two ahead in the conversation, I wisely changed the subject.

Much more about the WPC is posted at my web site.

E-mail your poker questions and comments to russ@luckydogpoker.com for use in future columns.

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