Lucky Dog Poker: 'Dream Team Poker' adds competitive layer to tournaments

by Russ_Scott

The next big thing in tournament poker would change the game as we know it.

The idea â€” players joining forces to compete as teams â€” is both bold and old. Bold because it alters tournament strategies; old because many players have been partnering informally for a long time.

The trademarked concept, Dream Team Poker, was founded in 2007 and held a closed premiere event last November. This weekend, Caesars Palace in Las Vegas hosts the first public DTP tournament.

What makes the format different?

Well, a Dream Team Poker event actually is two tournaments in one. Players compete individually as usual, with eliminations continuing until a champion is determined. In addition, players are scored as a three-person team vying for a separate slice of the cash pool and team prizes.

At Caesars, for example, the expected 100-team field (300 total players) will produce a $150,000 prize pool based on a $1,500 buy-in per team. Each player also pays a $50 entry fee, for a $550 total cost per player. Sixty percent of the pool, or $90,000, goes to the top five teams, while $60,000 is distributed to the final 18 individual finishers.

"The Dream Team Poker concept provides a needed, new experience to players," Daniel Delshad, CEO of Dream Team Gaming, said in a news release.

Indeed, a game that traditionally pits an individual against a roomful of opponents takes on an added layer of competition with team play. Think of it as like golf played Ryder Cup style, with each player counting on teammates for success.

What's not so new is that tournament poker players figured out long ago that having a partner in an event increases the chance to make money. It's fairly common for two or more players in a tournament to agree to exchange a percentage of any winnings with each other.

Dream Team Poker formalizes partnership competition with a simple scoring system. Each team receives

points based on the finishing position of its top two members. The lowest team total wins.

For example, in November, pro Justin Bonomo's team won with 17 points. Bonomo finished 10th individually and teammate Eric Morris came in 7th. The team's third member, Matthew Parvis, finished 76th â€” but those points were discarded. The runner-up team had a player who finished second in the tournament, but the team's next-best finisher placed 21st, for a team score of 23.

To address the issue of possible collusion by partners, Dream Team Poker seats players throughout the event so that teammates (wearing custom team jerseys) don't play together. When the field reaches two tables or less and separation isn't possible, floor supervisors will be particularly alert for infractions.

DTP events follow general tournament rules, with an interesting exception. When the field reaches 27 players, each remaining team receives two timeouts. A player facing a tough decision can call a 90-second timeout and discuss the hand with an eliminated teammate. In normal play, getting outside help during a hand is not allowed.

Dozens of pros have formed their own teams to compete at Caesars, with the trio of Phil Hellmuth, Mike Matusow and Jerry Buss installed as pre-event favorites. At least one all-female team â€” Tiffany Michelle, Maria Ho and Lacey Jones â€” has registered to play.

The format sounds like fun, and at least one thing's for sure: Players knocked out early won't be stalking unhappily toward the exit as usual because, who knows, they could be needed later for a timeout chat!

From Dream Team to Dream Table

Amateur player Arnold Thimons of Greensburg, Pa., is battling against some of those same team pros all this week on "Poker After Dark's" Dream Table III match on NBC â€” and he's blogging the experience exclusively at www.luckydogpoker.com!

You can follow along and offer comments after each of the six nightly episodes. Check local listings for show times.

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

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