

ADVENTURES OF A POKER DAD



John Blowers (right) with Annie Duke.

## An Insider's Peek at Fox Sports' 'Best Damn Poker Show' From a Contestant

by John Blowers

**Editor's Note:** In last month's issue, poker author and dream chaser John Blowers auditioned and was selected for the second season of the poker reality series Best Damn Poker Show, traveling to Los Angeles to film the episodes. This month he shares his experiences both behind and in front of the cameras. Check next month's issue for the exciting conclusion of John's TV saga.

SEPTEMBER 9, 2:15 A.M.

Today's the big day! In seven hours I'll

be on my way to the set to start filming. I'm back in the room and ready to sleep until breakfast arrives at 8 a.m.

SEPTEMBER 9, 5:50 A.M.

A colleague calls, forgetting I'm on West Coast time. A few minutes later my alarm goes off as I failed to set it cor-

rectly. Oh well, I'm now on seven hours sleep for the past three nights...perfect formula for me to make my poker debut on national television.

SEPTEMBER 9, 9 A.M.

Show up for the shuttle at the assigned time and Jay from Fox Sports informs



Members of the cast from season two of Fox Sports' Best Damn Poker Show pose on the set.

us the time has been changed to noon. I begin to wonder if I'm appearing on *Best Damn Sports Show* or *Candid Camera*. Moments later Jay declares we're back on the original schedule and my team, Team B, loads into the van and we're off. Sort of. The show forgot nametags, so we hunt down an Office Depot and make a quick stop. I shake my head and wonder to myself whether these guys are familiar with the concept of pre-production meetings.

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#### SEPTEMBER 9, 10:05 A.M.

I'm backstage waiting for makeup and player interviews. There's lots of chatter about the matchups today. Four tables will play for up to 90 minutes each. Players start with 10,000 chips and the blinds are at 100-200, effectively doubling every 15 minutes. Veteran tournament director Matt Savage will be calling the action. The collective wisdom of the players is that tables B & D have the toughest players. Great...I'm on B. Annie Duke strolls in wearing comfortable clothes and her omnipresent boots. Her phone rings to the mesmerizing riff from Led Zeppelin's *Kashmir* and she has a semi-animated discussion, repeatedly accenting her points with the word "totally" while dropping enough F-bombs to warrant a three-hour penalty if this were the WSOP.

#### SEPTEMBER 9, 10:15 A.M.

Makeup is backed up, but they're ready for my first interview. Oh well, guess I'll have to rely on my natural good looks. Andrew from Fox Sports asks me about dinner the previous night and what I thought about the format. He gets excited when I share the shuttle bus drama from last night, when my teammate Rem in true reality-show style tried to leave me stranded at the casino. I tell him Rem and I will sort it out on the felt.

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#### SEPTEMBER 9, 10:30 A.M.

Makeup is still backed up and it's time for my second interview. This one focuses on me and my poker experience and the person asking the questions doesn't bother to introduce himself. When I mention I'm here to learn and improve my game, the interviewer asks if I shouldn't have buttoned down my game before coming on the show. My first thought is to answer, "What the #\$^%? This is basically a \$50K freeroll...when I play these online, I'm usually sleeping through half the tournament and doing laundry the rest of the time." I opt for a more diplomatic response.

#### SEPTEMBER 9, 10:45 A.M.

The Table A players take to the felt. They are obviously nervous. No one is talking. There's a technical difficulty that holds up filming for about 15 minutes after the first hand. Backstage we're able to see the play, but we can't hear or see the hole cards. When play resumes, the girl at the table is getting run over. Her name is Christina and she's from L.A. She folds a couple of times when other players come over the top of her. Respect for women in poker continues to lag behind where it should be. I hear one of my fellow contestants ponder out loud whether her lips or her boobs are more enhanced. There are no showdowns for the first hour until Christina pushes with K-9 and the big blind wakes up with A-K. Her hand doesn't improve and she's eliminated a few minutes later when Annie and Phil come out and analyze each player's performance.

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#### SEPTEMBER 9, 12:15 P.M.

Makeup artist Tracy has finished making me up and now Rory is miking me up as I prepare to head onto the set. Fox Sports has set up a table with a light set

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overhead and several fixed cameras around the room, and Ultimate Bet has festooned the walls with a dozen large and small logos. Matt Savage explains how to show cards to the hole cam and a couple of other TV pointers. A moment later our dealer, Rachel, arrives. She's been hand-picked by the management of San Manuel Casino and she seems to be in a good mood. Suddenly, she's asked to step away from the table and Hollywood Dave – who is hosting this season after being a contestant last year – replaces her. The cameras are rolling as he welcomes us to the “Ultimate Poker Experience.” After wishing us luck, he's off and Rachel returns as the cards are in the air. High card goes to seat 5. I'm in seat 1, so I'll be the first big blind since we're playing six-handed, starting with 10,000 in chips.

Seats 2 and 3 fold, but Rem – the guy who tried to strand me at the casino last night – raises my 200 blind to 500. Seats 5 and 6 fold. I look down at J-7 suited. I decide I'm going to call and steal post-flop. The flop comes J-Q-K rainbow and I fire 700 into the pot. Rem folds and I tell him we're even for last night. He's the only one wearing sunglasses so it's hard to see his reaction, but I get a small smile out of him.

I'm card dead for about 15 minutes and watch a couple of players mix it up. A big pot goes to Birmingham Brad in seat six when he reraises all-in against Jamie – who is next to me in seat 2. She does a good job probing for enough information to decide to fold. We find out later he flopped the nut straight on a board of 9-10-Q. Jamie seems a bit anxious to show her poker chops and has been caught making moves twice already.

Early in Round 2 I pick up A-8 in the cutoff. Seats five and six fold in front of me and I pop it to 1000...2.5 times the big blind. Seats 2 and 3 fold. Rem goes into the tank, then reraises to 3300. I pause, then declare I need some help. I reach into my sportcoat pocket and pull out a copy of *Poker for Dummies* and begin reading about folding a medium ace when faced with a big raise and not being pot-committed. The table chuckles as I muck the dead man's hand. Rem later tells me he had pocket kings.

Late in Round 2 I limp from middle position with 7-5 offsuit. I play the hand as a bit of a joke since the panel at the audition in Vegas told me Annie would boot me if I ever played this hand. The blinds just call and the flop comes A-K-J. Scotty leads out from the big blind and I can't fold this hand fast enough.

Dave is in seat 2 and hasn't played a hand yet as we enter Level 3. The chip leader at this point has immunity unless he loses this advantage. Bard is currently in this position. I steal a couple of more blinds and am still above average in chips. With the blinds now 300-600, Scotty raises from the button to 2100. I look down at J-8 offsuit. I consider making a move here. Basically, my choices are all-in or fold. I indicate I need to consult a real poker book and reach in my other sportcoat pocket to pull out my novel, *Life on Tilt*. The other players laugh as I find a relevant passage and begin reading to myself, certain the producers will rush the stage and end my blatant PR move, confiscating my book in the process. Instead, they come out and reshoot the scene from another angle after I muck my hand.

## What Is the Best Damn Poker Show?

**FOX SPORTS' BEST DAMN POKER SHOW** is part reality show, part poker show. Billed as the Ultimate Poker Experience, its goal is to find the next poker icon from among thousands of amateur, semi-pro and professional poker players who auditioned. Two dozen were selected for season 2.

At the same time, Phil Hellmuth and Annie Duke are competing to see who the better poker instructor is.

Phil and Annie each coach a team of players who compete against each other. Players strive to be in Phil and Annie's top three, who then compete for tournament buy-ins. The top three receive UltimateBet Aruba Poker Classic entries. The overall winner also gets a WSOP Main Event entry.

The show is airing now. ♠

## HEY, I'VE GOT BIG SLICK!

I head into Round 4 with 7k of my original 10k in chips. No one has been eliminated. Moments later, disaster strikes. In my novel, the main character is an accomplished poker player with a self-destructive streak. Apparently, I'm destined to play this character today. I pick up A-K offsuit under the gun and raise the 1000 big blind to 2700. Everyone folds to Birmingham Brad, the chip leader. He smooth calls and warning bells go off. Is he concealing a monster? Why would he call when he could fold his way to immunity?

Rachel reveals the flop: 10-9-3 rainbow. Brad checks. I consider shoving all-in, but I've put him on a made hand and opt to check. If he didn't have a pocket pair, he may have called with A-10 or A-9. I check. The turn is a six. Another check/check. The river brings a jack and Brad leads out for 1500 into a 6500 pot. Getting more than 5-1 on my money, I almost have to call. I'm down to 4300 so I can't push him out of the pot with a raise. I start the game of “What can I beat?” (always a bad proposition) and hope he has A-Q or A-8...maybe A-K for a split. As I call, I declare that I've just donked myself off the show.

Birmingham Brad flips over K-J for top pair.

Annie and Phil come out ten minutes later and confirm I'm the lucky one to be off the show from this table. Although seat 2 hasn't played a hand and I played my other few hands well, I know about the “recency” effect and the big slick debacle proves fatal. ♠

**Next month:** Reports from the card-rooms, reuniting with the cast and the answer to the age-old question: “How much can a group of degenerate gamblers wager on a dinner bill?”



*John Blowers is the author of Life on Tilt: Confessions of a Poker Dad (www.lifeontilt.com). You can contact him at johnblowers@lifeontilt.com.*