

P O K E R O N T V



An Inside Look at
Fox Sports' 'Best
Damn Poker Show'
by Someone in
The Trenches

PHOTO: INSERT CREDIT HERE

Adventures of a Poker Dad

by John Blowers

Editor's Note: In the predawn hours of September 8, Life on Tilt: Confessions of a Poker Dad author John Blowers pulled out of his driveway in upstate New York to catch a transcontinental flight to Ontario, California, to appear as a contestant on Season 2 of the Fox Sports program Best Damn Poker Show. He's spent the previous evening watching WSOP events on TV and playing in a live tune-up tournament. Operating on zero sleep, he shakes his head and wonders: "How did all this happen?" This is part one of his story.

THURSDAY, JULY 3, 2:25 P.M. PT

I'm at the Gaming Life Expo in Las Vegas as the first of four day ones of the Main Event is underway a few hundred yards from where I'm standing. In front of me is a stunning blonde handing me a tube of sunscreen and saying, "You have a good look, you should try out for the TV show." Being recently divorced, I'm susceptible to suggestions from attractive females, so...

FRIDAY, JULY 4, 10:30 A.M. PT

I'm in the Rio standing near the theater where Penn and Teller perform as someone named Lailani is handing me a stack of papers to fill out in order to audition. Moments later I'm back in the Gaming Life Expo meeting Susie Isaacs - the last woman to make the Main Event final table - when my cellphone rings. It's Lailani...they're ready for my audition! I wander back through the hallways of the Rio and, after having makeup

applied and getting miked, I head “on set” to be grilled by three guys who don’t bother to introduce themselves. The audition lasts about five minutes. As I exit the set, I hear the stage manager say, “This guy is good TV.” Good to know, but it’s time to get back and find my new friend Susie.

FRIDAY, JULY 4, 6:05 P.M. PT

I’m back on set, makeup and mike in place and staring across the felt at Phil Hellmuth and Annie Duke, *UltimateBet.com*’s top pros. Annie starts ribbing Phil about some smart-ass comment I made about him in the papers I filled out and they get into it a bit with each other. Annie remembers me as “the guy with the poker novel” and we chat for a bit, then I’m done. Another five-minute audition. When I learn I tested “at the top,” I decide it’s time to find out what I’m getting myself into. I know this is a reality show of sorts, but I don’t have time to go live in a house for three months and shoot the s—t with a bunch of aimless strangers as some sort of aberrational poker experiment. Fortunately, I’m told the shoot will take only a few days.

MONDAY, JULY 28, 11:45 A.M. ET

I’m at the headquarters of Junior Achievement of Northeastern New York, a non-profit group whom I share proceeds of my book with, when Lailani calls and wants to know if I’m available the week of September 8. I indicate I could be and she says they’ll finalize

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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 is the better poker instructor.

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 scheduled to begin airing between October 22 and 29 and will run for seven weeks. ♠

their selections by August 8. I hear nothing for four weeks and then...

FRIDAY, AUGUST 22, 12:45 P.M. ET

I’m driving to my lawyer’s and on the phone with former top 10 poker pro Charlie Shoten, discussing him appearing in a scene for the movie based on my book, when a call from (222) 222-2222 comes in. I’ve had a few of these this week, but ignored them figuring it was this lunatic chick I’ve been trying to avoid. This time I click over and discover Nancy from UltimateBet wondering why I hadn’t filled out a questionnaire she sent me two weeks ago, which had been conveniently sent to the wrong email address. Turns out the questionnaire is 15 pages long, asking me all kinds of questions like, “If you were invisible for a day, what would you do?” I’m not kidding, this was an actual question. My response, for the record: “Play in a high-stakes hide & seek tournament.”

THURSDAY, AUGUST 28, 2:30 P.M. ET

UltimateBet calls. They want to know

where my headshot is. This was the first time they had asked for one, but they made it sound like I’m holding things up...a la Nancy and the questionnaire. I promise to fire one in as soon as I get to an Internet connection.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2, 3:15 P.M. ET

UltimateBet calls. They want to know my T-shirt size. This is the third time I’ve provided this data point to them. I suddenly wonder if TV show contestants are prone to wild weight gain or loss immediately prior to the filming.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2:15 P.M. ET

The show is three days away and I have no flight information when Bob calls from Fox Sports. God bless Bob. He has some details for me and indicates my itinerary was emailed. Sure enough, they used the same wrong email that Nancy had originally used for the questionnaire. Plus they put the ticket in a misspelled version of my name. I swear I’ve seen better organized 8-year-old birthday parties.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2:00 ET

I’m a bounty in the Saratoga Poker Club’s \$125 tourney. This is my first time visiting them and they prove to be a great group of players...except for Greg, who hits an inside straight flush on the turn versus my third nut flush to bounce me from the event. Oh well, it was a bad call on my part anyway.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 9:45 A.M. ET

I’m in Boston, having just arrived in a 19-seat puddle jumper heading from New York to California, as the network sends me 200 miles east to cross the country in the other direction. When we land, I call Olya P., a Russian poker-playing model from NYC and discover we are rendezvousing in Phoenix to fly to Ontario, California, together. Moments later we’re in the air and I’m reading my autographed copy of Doyle Brunson’s *Poker Wisdom of a Champion* to get in the mood for this week.

P O K E R O N T V

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MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1:20 P.M. PT

I'm on the last leg of this odyssey and I'm sitting next to a man named Bruce who gives me the lowdown on the San Manuel Indian Bingo and Casino, where the filming will take place. It's a medium-size casino with a massive number of bingo and slot machines, along with a relatively large poker room, but no hotel. An hour later we land and I meet some of the other contestants. There's Tony, who immediately makes me wonder if he's legal to gamble, and Brad, who's from Birmingham and has a job that pays full-time, but only takes him 18 hours a week, leaving him plenty of time to work on his poker game.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 6:30 P.M. PT

Off to dinner crammed in the shuttle service ten to a van. There are 24 contestants in all, plus two alternates. A 20-minute ride later and we are at the San Manuel Indian Bingo and Casino. We're heading to dinner with the show's hosts, including Phil Hellmuth and Annie Duke.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 7:25 P.M. PT

I'm in a slow-moving line for more than 30 minutes on an empty stomach, so I steal away to the Oasis Deli for some take-out popcorn chicken and quickly return to the line. The line's been really moving and instead of 22 people in front of me, now there's only two. Suddenly, Andrew from Fox Sports confiscates my snack and I'm on my way to meet Hollywood Dave, who is hosting this season after being a contestant last year. The cameras are rolling as I enter the restaurant. I'm still reeling from the chicken snatching as I enter and forget

my "Shuffle Up and Meal" cornball line when I meet Dave. Oh well, there will be plenty of opportunity for me to make a fool of myself over the next few days.

I sit down and have the unenviable joy of being last to the table and trying to learn five new names while the cameras are rolling. Across from me is Jamie, who goes by the online handle of ItsASickness and runs a business in the Reno area. She's a firecracker and ready to prove to the rest of us and the viewing audience that she can play poker. Next to me is Dave, who goes by MakeItRain online. He is a last-minute addition to the show and seems to be wondering what he is doing here.

Across from Dave is Birmingham Brad, whom I had met at the airport. Next to Brad is Rem, who is "mostly from the Jacksonville area." He liberally dishes out poker catch phrases, regaling us with his poker acumen. Across the table from Rem and battling him for table supremacy is Scotty, who clearly has a colorful past and, from what I can tell, an equally colorful future ahead of him, spicing up the dinner conversation with tales of running guns across state lines and fleeing from armed robberies.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 10 P.M. PT

Dinner is breaking up. Phil stopped by...as did Annie and the others on Team UB. Here's my take on them. Phil is Phil...he delivers his lines and stays in character, but it wasn't his best performance. Mark "POkerH0" Kroon is a coach with Phil. He seems happy to be on the inside and a bit of a hanger-on. Annie is very genuine, there's no b.s. She's joking about her line from this week's WSOP episode on ESPN where she claimed she wasn't a total

bitch...emphasizing the word "total."

Shawn Rice is a coach with Annie and he seems to be the most humble of the bunch. Hollywood Dave seems slightly uncomfortable in front of the cameras, delivering rehearsed lines, but he's chasing his dream and I wish him well with it.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 10:01 P.M. PT

Okay, dinner's over...time to hit the felt. The shuttle leaves in 90 minutes and the list is forever long for the no-limit tables, so the \$4-\$8 kill game it is for me. I get seated immediately and pick up A♦-J♦ in early position. I raise, then the BB reraises. Four of us see the flop of K-Q-6 rainbow. BB bets and I call, as does one other player. The turn is a 10, giving me Broadway. BB bets, I raise and the other player folds. BB calls.

"Don't pair the board," I telepathically tell the dealer. He's not listening and peels off another 6. BB bets, I donate \$8 and he flips his pocket kings for about a \$100 pot. 75 minutes later I've recovered and I'm up \$60 when it's time to go as the shuttle bus arrives.

I then get my first lesson in reality TV competition when I ask Rem to hold the bus for a minute as I chat with one of the casino executives, then – as I exit moments later – the shuttle bus pulls away with Rem in the back seat and me trying to remember the name of the hotel I'm staying at.

Damn these room keycards with no information on them! ♠

Next month...reports from backstage, on the set, in the poker rooms and an on-air blow-up only Hellmuth could be proud of...stay tuned.



John Blowers is the author of Life on Tilt: Confessions of a Poker Dad (www.lifeontilt.com). The book takes readers to a world where strategy is valued, aggression is rewarded

and there is no mercy for those who go on tilt. Just like life. You can contact John at johnblowers@lifeontilt.com.