

Casino Promotions • Customer Service • Marketing

The number one publication for today's gaming executives

August 2009

Special Table Games Issue!



Who We're Raving About: Mentors, Friends and Folks that Inspire Us — **Blair Rodman, professional poker player, author and speaker at Raving's Cutting Edge Table Games Conference** By Andy Holtmann

Blair Rodman is a professional poker player who has been in the scene for three decades. While primarily a cash-game player in his early career, after the poker boom of 2003, he decided to focus his efforts on tournament poker. In 2004, he had six cashes and three final tables at the World Series of Poker, including a strong run in the main event. He followed that with two second-place finishes on World Poker Tour televised events and two more final tables and TV appearances on the Ultimate Poker Challenge. He currently stands 39th on the all-time WSOP cash list, one behind Doyle Brunson and tied with Phil Ivey. He capped his WSOP resume with a bracelet win and \$707,000 in the \$2,000 no-limit event.

Blair's unique perspective from the player side of poker has resulted in numerous public speaking engagements, radio and television interviews and writing opportunities. He co-authored the poker tournament strategy book, "Kill Phil," and is lending his expertise as a speaker at Raving's Cutting Edge Table Games Conference, August 17-19, 2009, at Mandalay Bay. Blair recently took the time to speak to Raving about his experiences as a poker player and his thoughts about the state of poker play today.

You're presenting at Raving's Cutting Edge Table Games Conference, on the panel, "How to Make Poker a Revenue Driver Instead of a Nuisance Amenity." You have a lot of experience in the poker world. Can you give us a preview of some of the points you'll make at the conference?

*One of the things I've been thinking of talking about is how you have to have a core group of players to keep games going. You need to cater to your locals so you have people come in and start your games every day.
Continued on Page 15...*

Meet Blair Rodman at Raving's Cutting Edge Table Games Conference!

www.ravingconsulting.com/tablegames.html

Inside This Issue...

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF GAMING & NON-GAMING PROMOTIONS pages 2-11

SPOTLIGHT ON SERVICE pages 12-14

- Steve's Soapbox: Stretching the Rubber Band
- Where Are All the Customers??? by Winnie Grand
- Your Gaming Professional Library: Top Picks

LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION pages 15-17

- Who We're Raving About: Interview with Blair Rodman (continued from front cover)

MARKETING MIX pages 18-19

- Design: High Limit Rooms by David Kranes

RESOURCES FOR THE GAMING EXECUTIVE page 19-24

- My Gift To The Table Game Operators by Dennis Conrad
- Raving Special Feature: The "DNA" of an Effective Table Game Operation – Quiz
- Raving in the News: Trump Taj Majal Slot Department Newsletter



LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION

Who We're Raving About (Continued from front cover) ...

That's where I think a lot of (casinos) make a mistake; they think people will just show up. So you have to really take care of the people who are going to help you start those games. What poker players are mostly concerned with are the amenities and the comfortableness of the room, the food, comps, etc. And, of course, there's the rake, which is usually not negotiable. But if there's a way to give back to people who are your loyal customers, then you need to find ways to do just that.

Poker rooms have become a common amenity at many casinos. In your opinion are they treating poker players appropriately, or are there certain things most could be doing better?

It's a mixed bag. With poker being so popular for awhile, a lot of them figured it would just go on forever and that they didn't necessarily have to take care of anybody. There was a time where a lot of the players were being treated worse than they had in the past. As more casinos put in rooms, the competition became a little greater and they started to look at the players' needs and keeping them happy in order to keep them coming back.

You've been in the gaming business for around 30 years now. How did you get into gambling and poker?

I got to Vegas in 1980 and started as a craps dealer, but I was also playing poker on the side, which was what I wanted to do at the time. By 1985 I was able to get away from a full time job and concentrate on poker. I got into playing casino tournaments, blackjack tournaments, poker tournaments, etc. with Stanford Wong and his group in the 1980s. We were very well known and traveled across the world playing in tournaments. But I always came back to poker and I played in the World Series of Poker Tournaments going as far back as the early 80s. I played cash games pretty regularly for quite a while until 2000. Then I decided to focus primarily on tournaments, especially after 2003 and the poker explosion. Tournaments became my full-time gig and I wrote "Kill Phil" and I've enjoyed some pretty good success since. I have delved into a few other business opportunities on the side, but I always come back to poker. It's my mainstay.

Any anecdotes or interesting lessons you've learned in playing poker all these years?

You learn a lot about people. You see people at their best. You see them at their worst. You have to try and figure out what people's motivations are ... why they're there. That's what you have to pay attention to. A story that I tell sometimes is about when I first started playing, there was talk of a guy who had been playing, I believe, at the Golden Nugget. He went broke at the table and told the table to hang on and lock his seat. He came back about a half hour later with more money and started playing again. About 10 minutes later, the cops came in and arrested him. Apparently he had gone out and robbed a bank. The funny part of that story is I was retelling it several years later at the poker table and a guy at the end of the table pipes up and says, "Hey, that was me!"

Wow, so old habits never die, I guess, right?

(Laughing) Yeah ... you know poker is a fun game and there's always a lot of interesting things going on. I used to spend a lot of time with the old-timers like Johnny Moss and he would tell me stories of the old days. The gambling life is pretty interesting. It's very sterilized now compared to the old days.



LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION

How would you say poker's chances for the future are? Obviously it hit a big boom a few years back, but has dwindled off a bit since. How, in your opinion, is poker's longevity?

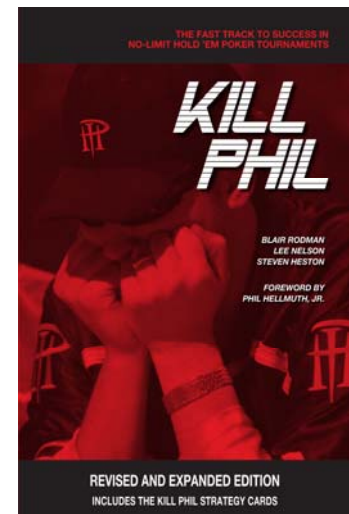
I think a lot of it depends on what happens with online. If it's legalized online, which there's talk of, then I think it will come back in a big way or continue on in a big way. If not, I think it will still prosper. Prior to 2003, most poker in Las Vegas was pretty much dead. Play was very much down. Although in California, it was still booming. California was very much the place to play. After 2003, poker in Vegas really picked up and a lot of the players said, "Ok, we can go back to Vegas." And a lot of them did. But it's starting to die off again. That was before the economy. Now with the economy the way it is, it's starting to die off everywhere. So naturally, a lot of it is going to depend on people's disposable income and whether they can afford to go out and take part in poker as entertainment. Right now, the pro players are having to condense into smaller limits and look for more players. There's a much smaller player pool of live money out there that's needed to support these games. You need producers. You need people who are willing to come in and lose and have a good time. Without them, the games are going to struggle, and we're seeing that now. There are only a certain number of poker rooms that are going to survive. The people that do it the best, have the best locations and take poker seriously are going to be those ones that survive.

You noted online poker play and there's a huge amount of opportunity there. But if it's legalized online, do you think that will help or hinder the brick and mortar poker rooms?

I don't think it will hurt them, I think it will help them. It will keep people playing. It will keep people wanting to take their online skills to the next level ... to the live level and tournaments like the World Series of Poker. We're seeing that today with all these online players saying it's time for them to start playing live. So I don't think it will hurt it. It's going to keep people's interest up. If it were to be legalized, then I think there would be plenty of legal ways to tie in poker rooms to these sites, which is an issue now in that they can't really do so. If it was completely outlawed and no one could play online anywhere, I think that would really hurt poker.

Tell us a little about your book, "Kill Phil."

The book is essentially for all tournament players, but primarily for new players. The "Kill Phil" strategy is designed to give newbie players the best chance to compete against the great players. The way you do that is by using what we call "big-bet poker" or the "all-in move" to neutralize them. The best players don't want to put all their money in on a coin flip if they don't have to. So if you're adept at using this strategy, they back down a lot, which gives you an advantage of taking more of the money in the pot. If they want to get in a race with you to where they're flipping a coin, then that's great for you since you're an underdog to begin with. So it's just a strategy that turns the no-limit aspect of the game around on the better players and forces them to make big decisions they don't want to make. There's also a lot of other good stuff in the book about playing tournaments and other strategies. We start with the most basic, easiest rookie strategy and move through advanced strategies. We just came out with a second edition of "Kill Phil" that's updated with some new information.





LEADERSHIP & INNOVATION

What's your favorite part about playing poker?

There are a lot of things, but I love the competition of it. As you get older and can't do different things, you can still get out there and play poker and compete. What I like now is that you can compete against young people, old people, people from all around the world ... it's really become an international game. To be a good poker player, you have to be a good people watcher and there's a lot of interesting people out there to watch.



**Bring people into
your building week
after week for
pennies per visit!**

- ✓ Easy to operate
- ✓ Excellent ROI

**Check us out at
www.sportgame.com**

SPORT GAME™

Your Sports Contest Leader

PO Box 220 ~ Ocean Springs ~ MS ~ 39566
Phone (228)875-0082 ~ Fax (228)875-0029
SportGame is a Raving Recommended Resource

Get Your Complimentary Subscription Today!

Raving's Strategic Solutions Newsletter:
**Your Inspirational Source for Industry Buzz, Casino Promotions,
Customer Service, Marketing and More!**

Here's how: Contact the Raving team direct for your complimentary subscription

Phone: (775) 329-7864

E-mail: thebest@ravingconsulting.com