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Posted on Fri, Jan. 28, 2011

CasiNotes: Borgata starts six days of poker on Sunday



By Chuck Darrow

WHAT'S THE big deal in Atlantic City? Well, starting Sunday, it's the Winter Poker Open championship at Borgata Hotel, Casino & Spa.

The six-day, no-limit Texas Hold'em shootout will cap the Big B's annual Winter Open, which began Jan. 19. The tournament, which carries a \$3,500 "buy-in" and features a starting stack of 30,000 chips, has a guaranteed prize pool of \$2 million.

The "worst-case scenario" will see the top 63 finishers get anywhere from about \$6,600 to a grand prize of \$750,000, according to Borgata Director of Poker Marketing Ray Stefanelli.

However, Stefanelli is feeling confident about a strong turnout. One reason is that the Winter Open's first competition, a \$500 buy-in, no-limit Hold'em game, drew almost 1,500 players - a record for the casino's annual January throwdown and something Stefanelli sees as a good omen. Another is the relatively low entry fee; most big-time poker tournament final games are priced between \$5,000 and \$10,000.

Stefanelli expects a number of poker stars to participate because "the pros love coming out [for these kinds of stakes] because of the size of the field. They get what they call 'great value,' because for \$3,500, you can win \$750,000 to \$1 million."

Past winter opens have been won by the big-time likes of Michael "The Grinder" Mizrachi, John Hennigan and Gavin Griffin, the first player to achieve a professional poker "triple crown" by winning at least one tournament at three major events, including the World Series of Poker.

But Stefanelli insisted this august roster should in no way discourage nonpros from playing, noting 2009 winner Steven Weinstein, who scored a first-prize jackpot of \$658,000, was not a full-time cardsharp.

Because seats are randomly assigned, odds are most first-day players won't find themselves sitting within speaking distance of a poker celeb. But that doesn't mean they can't otherwise interact with a pro or two - or even a movie star like James Woods ("Casino," "Nixon"), a Borgata tourney regular.

"The good thing is, you can see celebrities walking around the hotel. You can bump into them and talk to them."

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Borgata Hotel, Casino & Spa, One Borgata Way, 609-317-1000, theborgata.com.

'Jersey Outlaw' deals

a tune

Speaking of poker, it's hard to believe that - other than Kenny Rogers' maudlin '70s hit "The Gambler" - there really has never been a poker "anthem," not to mention a worthy one. (The Rogers tune was misleading in its advice: Real poker players know that strong money management is crucial to winning, so his suggesting "you never count your money" at the table is really stupid.)

Anyway, South Jersey country-rocker and avid Hold'em player Jimmie Lee (a/k/a "The Jersey Outlaw") has penned and recorded a stomping rocker with a cool, mid-song rap interlude called "I'm All-In." Full disclosure: In his other life, the Outlaw is Dr. James Weiner, a South Jersey dentist whose patients include yours truly.

The tune is starting to get a lot of attention in the global poker media. Sample it at jimmieleesongs.com and youtube.com. Buy it on Lee's website and at CDBaby.com and iTunes.com.



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'Dance-Off' on

The Swing Dance-Off originally scheduled for Jan. 13 at Bally's Atlantic City was postponed by inclement weather. Tomorrow night, dozens of couples will convene at the midtown gambling den to compete for \$5,000 in cash prizes.

The contest, a take-off on the dance marathons of the 1930s, will feature \$2,500 prizes in each of two categories - the longer "stamina," and "style." The former will require terpsichorean twosomes to keep moving for the better part of six hours. Those in the latter competition will be judged à la TV dance shows.

The festivities begin at 6 p.m. For rules and information, go to ballysac.com.

Onward and upward

Perhaps one of the reasons Atlantic City's gaming industry is in its current condition is because it has allowed some of its best and brightest execs to escape.

Earlier this month, Sands Las Vegas Corp., which owns such luxe mega-properties as Venetian and Palazzo on the Las Vegas Strip and the Sands in Bethlehem, promoted former Sands Atlantic City honcho Rob Goldstein to the post of president, global gaming operations (the company also has properties in Macau, China and Singapore).

Now comes word that Virginia McDowell, who spent many years on the Boardwalk in management at the Tropicana, has been named CEO of Missouri-based gaming company Isle of Capri. The appointment makes her the only female to hold the top day-to-day spot at a major American gaming company. Isle of Capri has 15 properties throughout the U.S.

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Chuck, there is a poker song that many players are aware of. The song is called "Crazy Game of Poker" by O.A.R (Of a Revolution). You might want to check that one out.

— girardgrad

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