

World Series of Poker, Top South African Player

Tuesday, 30 June 2009

On the 3rd of July over 6000 thousand poker players will take each other on in the Main Event of the World Series of poker in Las Vegas each dreaming of a 1st prize likely to be in excess of \$9 Million. For the first time ever a bookmaker has priced up on who the top South African player will be and Ray Rahme is a 7/1 favourite.

Rahme of course carved his name into local poker folklore when he finished 3rd in this tournament back in 2007 collecting prize money of over \$3 million an achievement which catapulted SA poker into the spotlight and gave the already growing industry in this country a timely boost.

Perhaps the most amazing thing about Rahme was his age and in a world so often dominated by youth, Rahme was on the wrong side of 60 when he stormed through to the final table en route to a podium finish. Contrast this with the age of last year's winner Peter Eastgate, who at 22 years became the youngest ever winner of the event and you get a feel for why poker is so popular - anybody can play it no matter what your age or physique although to gamble of course being over 18 is a must.

Back to this year's event and while poker is a mixture of skill and luck it is notoriously hard to pick a winner in this tournament as even the most skilful of player can be beaten by your Friday night poker school player should the cards not fall his way on any given hand. The skilful players will make their money in the long run but in a knockout tournament like this many of them will fall early although rest assured the player that wins will not be new to the game.

To enter the competition costs \$10 thousand which is one of the reasons I am back home in South Africa typing this blog rather than on a plane to Vegas. The game played is Texas Holdem which you have likely seen on TV and the tournament structure is a "freeze out" meaning once your chips are gone you are eliminated and this process continues until we have a winner.

To give you an idea how tough it is to pick a winner the man dubbed the "Tiger Woods of Poker" Phil Ivey is 100/1 to win the event and even that probably does not reflect his true odds which are likely much greater. Tiger Woods by the way never starts a golf tournament at less than 4/1 these days.

Back to the South African contingent and thanks to our local equivalent of the Main Event the All Africa Poker Championship which takes place quarterly at the Piggs Peak Casino, we will have a strong contingent flying the flag this year.

Most of the South Africans won their seat by doing well in the All Africa Poker tournament and due to television and general media coverage of the sport many are now household names.

Let's take a look at selected players quoted on Betting World who have opened up a book on the Top SA Player.

Ray Rahme – 7/1

You could call him the Doyle Brunson of SA poker and this wily veteran has patience in abundance but also an uncanny ability to make his big plays at the right time. In his All Africa profile he lists as one of his strengths his ability to read his opponents and loves nothing better than a starting hand with a pair of queens as his hole cards. In the latest Buff SA Poker rankings he is second but is given top spot in the betting markets due to his pedigree in this event.

Ryan Dreyer – 8/1

One of the voices of SA poker Ryan is currently ranked no 1 in the country which is all the more amazing when you consider he was also the SA Amateur golf champion this year and has just returned from a successful trip to the UK where he played in the British Amateur event. His career poker earnings in live events top the R5 million mark and the highlights have included winning the Sun City Million Dollar tournament in 2008 and cashing in a World Series Event last year. Ryan started playing poker in 1988 and since taking up poker commentary he has become a keen student of the game.

Jared Solomon – 10/1

If you are looking to back someone on current form then you could do worse than Jared who has already cashed in a World Series event this year (the World Series of Poker runs for close to two months and is a series of events of which the Main Event we are covering here is just one of them). He is only ranked 86 in South Africa but those rankings are based on local tournaments and this guy likes to mix it with the big guns offshore. Betting World is not going to be caught

napping though and his odds duly reflect his place amongst the favourites.

Ryan Brauer – 12/1

By his own admission Ryan is in a different frame of mind than last year this time and in an interview just before flying out to Vegas he mentioned he was confident of going deep. It is no surprise to find him so bullish as he is coming off a 4th place in the most recent All Africa tournament and had a few weeks before, won a tournament held at the Emeralds Casino. He has also fulfilled every poker player's dream of winning a World Series of Poker bracelet and he achieved that at the Bellagio back in 2008 when he won event no 23. A late starter to poker he only took up the game in 2004 but was able to turn pro back in 2006. Not afraid of a bit of trash talking at the table it would be mouth watering to see Ryan lock horns with the biggest mouth of them all in Phil Hellmuth in the main event.

Danny K – 25/1

Known to some as a top local musician I think of him more as the lucky guy who is engaged to Lee Ann Liebenberg who he partners as an ambassador for Piggs Peak the home of All Africa Poker . Unlike some celebrities this guy can really play and if he can keep his mind on the cards and away from Lee Ann who will no doubt be turning heads as she glides through Vegas then he may just have a sniff of going deep.

Neil Andrews – 50/1

The voice of South African soccer and the host of the Betting World TV show is off to Vegas to cover the World Series for All Africa Poker but at the same time he admits to dreaming about showing up the pro's and making it to the final table. Having played a couple of tournaments Neil's proudest poker moment was when he beat the Betting World production staff and a couple of regular panellists in a casual game played after Terry Paine's 70th birthday bash (it was after 6 in the evening when the game begun so Terry was asleep by that time and didn't play). Having played against him that night I considered lumping a few rand on him at 50/1 but I figure it would save time if I just contacted Betting World and made a direct contribution to this year's Christmas function.

To view all players quoted log onto www.bettingworld.co.za SO WHERE IS MY MONEY GOING?

First up be aware of the rule that at least 1 player must cash for bets to stand. The top 10% of players cash which means that at least one of the quoted SA players would need to finish in the top 600-800 players. If not all bets would be void however it is reasonable to expect at least 1 player will get that far.

Secondly let's not kid ourselves into thinking that this market is anything but wide open given the nature of the event so when betting keep your stakes sensible.

With that in mind my selections are as follows:

2 units* on Ryan "FBT" Brauer at 12/1

Having spoken with Ryan just hours before he flew out I really got the impression that he was as focused as he could possibly be this year. In poker like other sports current form is crucial and tends to come in waves and I am banking on "FBT" (Fat Boy Tough) riding his current wave to World Series glory. By the way you can follow his progress by signing up for his Facebook blog at this link <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=105872347518&ref=mf>

1 unit on Aston Soon Singh at 33/1

Aston impressed me by winning his ticket at the February 2009 All Africa Poker tournament where he was not afraid to make aggressive moves. He is also on my "Best Bet"*** mailing list so is a bit of a sentimental choice.

1 unit Neville Eber at 40/1

Another poker veteran in his mid 60's I have watched him go deep in many an All Africa Poker tournament and he certainly has the temperament to do the same here. At 40/1 he looks worth a flutter.

*A unit is just a bet size ranking as R100 may be small for someone but a massive bet for someone else. For me 10 units is a big bet and as you can see I am keeping things small for this event with 2 units my biggest bet.

**E-mail me at brent@goodforthegame.co.za to get my weekly best bet by e-mail or join my Facebook group here <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=71025649115&ref=mf>

To keep an eye on how the SA Players are doing once the tournament starts log onto the All Africa Poker blog at www.allafricapoker.com/blog/ and also make sure you are following these updates on twitter :

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