KITT HAPPENS

Singer-songwriter turned poker phenomenon Tom Kitt reveals all in an intriguing interview

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POKER FACE

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The latest updates from the WSOP

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John O’Shea reports back from his Vegas voyage

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PULL-OUT FREE WITH THE THE IRISH RACING POST ON THE LAST SATURDAY OF EACH MONTH
Deals at business end in Dundalk and Carlow

By Ken Powell

JUNE’S two biggest domestic tournaments followed the lead of May’s JP Poker Masters main event, with multi-way deals in the latter stages.

Aidan McAllister was deemed the winner of last weekend’s Irish Eyes Northern Open at the Fairways Hotel in Dundalk following an equity split requested by the last six remaining players.

McAllister was presented with €5,000 and the trophy, while Alex Sccaul, JP White, Stephen Nesson, Connie O’Sullivan and Jeff Jones carved up a further €30,000.

The 260+40 event attracted 200 runners, contributing to a prize pool of €52,000.

It was a similar story at the 136-runner Celtic Poker Tour Grand Final earlier this month, with a three-way chop settling matters at the Dolmen Hotel in Carlow.

Tom Kitt was presented with €19,200 and the title, while Tommy Walsh and Dimitri Pembroke took home €15,200 and €14,700 respectively.

Other notable final-tablists at the €600+75 event included evergreen Northerner Mick McCloskey and popular Dublin potter Colnette Murphy. Veteran side-event specialist Nicky Power prevailed in the 51-runner €200 tourney in Carlow, while Elaine Moloney took down the 35-runner €150 game.

Season 8 EPT schedule unveiled

By Ken Powell

THE EUROPEAN Poker Tour has released the first half of its Season Eight schedule. The first seven events on the schedule will take players to locations as diverse as Tallinn, Estonia, for the first event in early August and the Bahamas in January.

The first seven events feature two festivals of poker – in London in late September and early October and at the PCA in early January.

The other stops in the first half of the tour are Barcelona in Spain, Deauville in France, Prague in the Czech Republic, and San Remo in Italy.

The largest change to the schedule can be found with the dates of the EPT San Remo main event, which will take place from October 21-27. The popular tournament on the Italian Riviera has usually taken place in April in years past, but it will now hope to attract players who are participating in the World Series of Poker Europe in Cannes, France, earlier in October.

EPT Chairman John Duthie said: “We’re delighted to announce the dates for the first half of EPT Season 8. We’re expecting another incredible year, with a whole host of new champions crowned and maybe even the first ever two-time EPT main event winner”.

Swedish online poker phenom Viktor Blom aka Isildur1 said he can’t wait for the new season to begin. He added: “I’m really looking forward to the coming EPT season. My live game is something I want to work hard on improving, and I would love to have some deep runs this year. I plan to play in most of the events, including Barcelona, the PCA and London. Those stops will be big events for me.”

Slog on the Tyne pays for Foley

By Ken Powell

BRISH grinder Barry Foley took home over £18,000 last week for his fourth-place finish at UKIPT Newcastle.

Scottish pumper Richard Sinclair, who has cashed in the WSOP main event for the past two years, defeated Englishman Raj Verma heads-up to land the title and £67,000.

Foley, from Portlaw in Co Waterford, was always chipping away on the final table and laddered his way to fourth following an impressive slog on the Tyne.

Tadhg Ryan, from Cork, also made it to the final table, sporting a plaster cast on his right hand due to a hurling injury.

Mizzi’s honour as poker players help charity

By Ken Powell

Sorel Mizzi

CANDIAN pro Sorel Mizzi has kick-started a new charity program with an initial $10,000 donation for Poker Players Against Poverty (PPAP).

It’s part of A Good Idea, a non-profit program that connects people in need with those who want to help alleviate hardship and homelessness.

PPAP now hopes to recruit other like-minded poker players who will commit service days and percentages of their tournament winnings in the fight against poverty.

In addition to Mizzi’s first donation of $10,000, he has pledged five per cent of all tournament winnings through the lifetime of his poker-playing career.

The 25-year-old, from Toronto, will also participate in four service days and percentages of his tournament winnings in the fight against poverty.

Speaking about his new philanthropic endeavours, Mizzi said: “I am very excited for 2011 and beyond. I will be placing equal priority on progressing as a poker player and giving back to my community. As a young poker player with a talent that brings me financial abundance, I feel it’s my responsibility to give back to people in need who are hurting financially.”

Mizzi, nicknamed ImperiLum, finished third at the 2010 Aussie Millions for $599,319 and followed that up with a ninth place in this year’s renewal Down Under for $108,967.

More recently, he won Full Tilt Poker’s FTPPS XX Leaderboard challenge in May and cashed in two World Series of Poker bracelet events earlier this month.

By Ken Powell

“Irish Eyes Northern Open
1. Aidan McAllister €5,300
2. Alex Sccaul €7,100
3. JP White €6,475
4. Stephen Nesson €5,830
5. Connie O’Sullivan €5,520
6. Jeff Jones €4,925

Celtic Poker Tour Grand Final
1. Tom Kitt €19,200
2. Tommy Walsh €15,200
3. Dimitri Pembroke €14,700
4. Noel O’Brien €7,000
5. Alan McIntyre €5,000
6. Niall Rogers €4,000
7. Mick McCloskey €3,000
8. Colnette Murphy €2,000
9. Caroline Murphy €1,700

POKER NEWS
Congressmen move to legalise online poker in United States

By Ken Powell

BIG MOVES to legalise online poker were afoot in the United States this week, with Texas Republican Representative Joe Barton set to introduce legislation to make online poker lawful and set up a new federal agency to regulate it.

April 15 2011 came to be known as Black Friday in the online poker world when the FBI shut down PokerStars, Full Tilt Poker and Absolute Poker, three of the largest poker websites.

The companies were charged with illegal online gambling, bank fraud and money laundering.

However, Barton insists online poker is not illegal in itself, though he admits some processing payments used by online poker sites are unlawful.

According to various discussions on the proposed law, online poker sites will be registered and regulated in a state where gambling is legal, much like brick and mortar casinos.

Barton, a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and an avid poker player, will propose a bill that will allow payments for online poker games in states where such gambling is legal.

Barton’s spokesman Sean Brown said the Representative has been besieged by complaints from angry poker-playing constituents since Black Friday and added: “He is very serious about getting something done.”

A group known as Poker Players Alliance has been working with Barton to draft a bill that would bring online poker back to the comfort of Americans’ home computers and laptops.

And Barton isn’t the only lawmaker pushing the issue on the federal level. Washington Democratic Rep Jim McDermott will reintroduce legislation to tax licensed internet gaming in the US. His measure is a companion to legislation introduced by Massachusetts Democratic Rep Barney Frank that would legalise and regulate online gambling.

McDermott, who first introduced his legislation in 2009, said: “Legalising, regulating and taxing internet gambling just makes sense. “Right now, the US loses billion of dollars to off-shore gambling and illegal gambling rings because of an unrealistic and virtually unenforceable policy.

“The current prohibition of online gambling has failed and made countless American vulnerable to fraud, identity theft and money laundering.”

His revised bill’s provisions include an incentive for states and tribes to participate in the form of a six per cent tax on gambling deposits; two new revenue set-asides designating 25 per cent of the funds for foster kids; and 0.5 per cent reserved for historic preservation and the arts.

Tax incentives would be used to encourage illegal sites to operate within the law, while internet gambling would not be part of the current tax exemptions given to the horse and dog racing industries.
Black Friday fails to darken WSOP

By David Jennings

SO MUCH for Black Friday sending dark clouds over the Rio. The 2011 World Series of Poker has already smashed several records with attendance figures soaring from last year.

Through the first 30 events, participation was up 11.7%, with prize pools increasing by a total of 8.6% over their 2010 levels. At the halfway point of the Series, nearly $56 million in prize money had been awarded.

Before a hand was dealt at the WSOP, concerns were mounting over the way forward in Las Vegas. Indeed as he got heads-up with 'the drunk guy', Coors Lite-fuelled Spillane ultimately prevailed, however, so he postponed any rebuy PLO at the Venetian.

Runner-up Williams, for his part, wasn't too disappointed ultimately to lose to 'the drunk guy'.

As for Spillane and his pals, a source explained: "Well it was $500 plus $60 on top of the second $500 too. 'The Multiplier', finished 68th out of 1,734 runners for $9,500, while Galwayman Ainsworth took $5,200 for 156th.

Almost an hour later, Williams tweeted: 'He's getting drunker and his chips shorter. 3 9M to his 2 4M. Coors Lite-fuelled Spillane ultimately prevailed, however, and pocketed another $47,000 for the day's work."

Everything went according to plan on Thursday, so much so that Spillane, 44, let his hair down well before the final table. Indeed as he got heads-up with cocky US pro David Williams, the WSOP bracelets-holder and former WPT champion told his Twitter followers: "Heads up! Even chips vs the drunk guy.

Almost an hour later, Williams tweeted: 'He's getting drunker and his chips shorter. 3 9M to his 2 4M. Coors Lite-fuelled Spillane ultimately prevailed, however, and pocketed another $47,000 for the day's work."

He later revealed the structure of the event had affected his thirst, explaining: "Well it was $500 plus $60 juice to enter, but then when I took a re-buy I was shocked there was another $60 on top of the second $500 too. 'So obviously my view was I'll get back the $120 in 'free' beers. That was my strategic edge!' And he added: 'It's not often people win back-to-back omaha titles so I'm very proud of that.

While tournament organizers said all the right things in public, most observers expected a noticeable drop in attendance at the World Series but that hasn't transpired.

"We are humbled once again by the incredible turnout from players all over the world," WSOP Executive Director Ty Stewart said. "It has been a record-setting summer thus far in 2011 and we are confident it will continue through the duration of the Series.

Several tournaments have been record-breaking, either in terms of attendance or prizes. The Heads-Up Championship featured over $3 million in prizes, the largest prize pool ever for a heads-up tournament.

This year’s Series has also seen the largest (in terms of entries) tournaments in history for Omaha High/Low, Pot-Limit Omaha, Eight-Game Mix, and Seniors events. The Seniors Tournament also broke the record for the largest live $1,000 No-Limit Hold’em tournament ever with a single start day, as 3,752 players all begin the competition simultaneously. Perhaps the biggest growth, however, has come around the tournaments rather than in them. Side action, including cash games, daily tournaments and satellite tournaments, is reportedly up 45% year-over-year. The Rio has spread 96 tables of cash games that have mostly been filled to capacity, and over 150 satellite tournaments are planned.

In most minds, the real test will come when the Main Event starts on July 7. Last year’s main event attracted 7,319 players, and most observers had expected this number to come down somewhat due to Black Friday.
Racing Post Saturday, June 25, 2011

**Callaghan flies Irish flag in Vegas**

By Ken Powell

DUBLIN pot-limit omaha kingpin Dave Callaghan produced Ireland's best performance of the World Series so far, busting just before the final table of the $5,000 6-handed bracelet event in the Rio on Thursday morning.

Callaghan, who previously finished fourth in the WSOP Europe £10,000 PLO event in 2007, was knocked out in eighth place by eventual winner Jason Mercier, trousering $53,200 for his efforts.

The last three tables comprised a who's-who of PLO sharks, with luminaries including Tom ‘Durrrr’ Dwan, Erick Lindgren, Vanessa Selbst, Dave ‘Devilfish’ Ulliott, Chris Moorman, Peter Jetten, Mike ‘Timex’ McDonald and David Chiu all in the mix.

Indeed the 507-strong field was described by Pokernews.com as “the greatest ever assembled in modern WSOP history” – but it was no surprise to see Mercier claim the $619,575 first prize.

Callaghan, for his part, was left to rue what might have been, telling Poker Face: “Mercier runs unnaturally good. I guess I’ll just have to win the WSOP bracelet, from the $1,500 PLO event in 2007, was knocked out in eighth place by eventual winner Jason Mercier, trousering $53,200 for his efforts.

The Florida betting machine won the EPT San Remo in 2008 for €869,000 and he also has a previous WSOP bracelet, from the $1,500 PLO event in 2009, for which he received $237,400. Woods' A-5-4-3d was just too tough for Mercier’s Qc6c5d3s on the 10c winning straight, sparking wild celebrations from his raucous supporters as they jumped the rail to embrace their hero.

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The scariest adversary is the one with all the chips.
The scariest adversary is the one with nothing to lose.

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We ask Dublin professional poker star ANDREW GRIMASON the questions that everybody wants to know the answers to!

1. How did you start playing poker and what age were you?
   A fairly universal intro for me into poker. I started playing with my mates when we were about 16 and then watching it on TV increased the addiction. I guess the semi-interesting part was that the main friend I was playing with was John O’Shea who lives down the road from me. There are probably only about 50 pros in Ireland and two of us came from a cul de sac of 15 houses!

2. What was your first big breakthrough win?
   My breakthrough win would have been my cash in the WSOP Main Event 2007! I probably had less than $10,000 to my name, so scooping $300k was a nice boost to the bankroll! Pretty funny story how I won that ticket actually. I was playing in my gaff with a mate and I popped out to the shop for a minute so I left him at the wheel. He wasn’t paying attention and then the screen popped up with the axes! He panicked and ended up timing out! The two other lads got it all in pre-flip and pocket queens hinked a queen on the flop! So it could have been a very different summer for me!

3. Do you prefer playing live or playing online?
   Why?
   I generally prefer playing online, it’s so much faster and you can play more than one game at once. I like playing live tournaments though, it’s great fun playing live when you have a big stack! Although that hasn’t happened in a while!

4. Who would be the toughest possible player to face in a heads-up battle?
   There are so many good guys around these days. I guess the latest sick puppy from Sweden would be a nightmare, Viktor Blom aka Ildi1. He’s crushed some of the best in heads-up battles, it would be good cracking him in PLO though.

5. What was your most memorable hand?
   I guess this is just asking for a bad beat story! Probably my sickest was in the EPT Dublin a few years ago, I think it was 2007. Once again I was playing an event where the buy-in was about the same size as my bankroll! It was about 20 off the bubble and I got all the loot in with AA vs KK. Flop came Ace-high but he backdoored clubs to knock me out!

6. What has been your most memorable hand?
   A fairly uneventful intro for me into poker. I started playing with my mates when we were about 16 and then watching it on TV increased the addiction. I guess the semi-interesting part was that the main friend I was playing with was John O’Shea who lives down the road from me. There are probably only about 50 pros in Ireland and two of us came from a cul de sac of 15 houses!

7. Where is your favourite poker destination and why?
   Vegas is a lot of fun, but my wallet isn’t! I’m a big fan! The PCA in the Bahamas was probably the nicest place I’ve been.

8. What would be the best piece of advice you could give someone starting off?
   It’s so much tougher these days, you really have to work your ass off to get good now. Talk to people about hands, never just accept a situation, keep questioning everything. Ask why is a certain thing right, read forums, watch training videos, there’s so much info out there compared to when I was starting, take advantage of it!

9. What player do you think is one to keep an eye on in 2011 to take the poker world by storm?
   My roommate Nick Heather kills it online but hasn’t had a result live in a while, he’s due a big one for sure!

10. If you weren’t a professional poker player, what would you do to make a living?
   I guess this is just asking for a bad beat story! Probably my sickest was in the EPT Dublin a few years ago, I think it was 2007. Once again I was playing an event where the buy-in was about the same size as my bankroll! It was about 20 off the bubble and I got all the loot in with AA vs KK. Flop came Ace-high but he backdoored clubs to knock me out!

11. Any WSOP bracelet bets planned?
   Well I’m 38 tournaments in Vegas without a cash so I think I’ll lay off the side-bets for now.

12. Who do you admire most in poker?
   Guys like Blom, Phil Ivey, Sam Trickett, Tom Dwan - fellows who have beaten the top top games have to be respected. Although I don’t admire their lives, it seems that at the very top you have to be a complete degenerate.

13. What upcoming events do you plan to play in?
   I’m over in Vegas, the next event is the $2,500 hold'em/omaha.

14. What are your main poker goals for 2011?
   To try to make some money!

15. €500 added to tournaments in July
   All WSO P bracelet tournaments on Sunday, July 2, the Fitz is adding €500 to the Mid-month €160 Freezeout on Sunday, July 17 and also to the Saturday €125 Freezeouts on the 23 and 30 July. Book online www.fitzwilliamcardclub.com.

End of Month Freezeout – Thursday, July 28
   IRELAND’S premier monthly poker tournament takes place on Thursday 28th July – the Fitzwilliam End of Month €250 + €20 Freezeout. The main action will get underway at 8:30pm, with 1- table sit and go satellites from 5:30pm in the Club. Online looking for the End of Month is available on www.fitzwilliamcardclub.com (Credit Card or Moneybookers account).

Mid-Month €150 Freezeout
   SAVE the date for our Mid-Month Freezeout Tournament which takes place on Sunday, June 12 at 4:30pm. Buy-in €150 + €10, an extra €500 is being added to the prize pool, and seats are available online at www.fitzwilliamcardclub.com.

EMOP Dublin Satellites in the Fitzwilliam
   The EMOP Satellite is drawn from the 28 to 31 July and you can win a seat to the €100 Main Event in the Fitzwilliam. Taking place on all Thursdays in July at 8:30pm, the satellite buy-in will be €100 with €50 unlimited re-entries for first 3 levels.

Fitzwilliam Card Club Player of the Year 2011
   €500 added to Saturday Freezeouts
   UP FOR grabs with this coveted title is a special trophy along with an entry ticket to the €1100 UKIPT Main Event in Galway and €500 credit on FullTiltPoker.com. Pions are earned by buying into and finishing in the top 9 places in all poker tournaments in the Fitzwilliam Card Club between January and November this year. The bigger the tournament, the more points on offer. In the beginning of December, the top 2 players will sit down and play for the title, with the stack sizes corresponding to the points that have been won.

Fitzwilliam Casino and Card Club Festival 2011 Schedule
   Thursday, November 24
   €250 + €10, a new €250 Freezeout on Sunday, July 2, the Fitz is adding €500 to the Mid-month €160 Freezeout on Sunday, July 17 and also to the Saturday €125 Freezeouts on the 23 and 30 July. Book online www.fitzwilliamcardclub.com.
I wrote half my last album in a hotel room when I was travelling. It's business first though. I'll get the first bracelet out of the way and maybe then we'll have a party.”

Tom Kitt is the son of the Fianna Fail politician with the same name who served as a TD for the Dublin South constituency from 1987 to 2011 and was also Government Chief Whip from 2004 to 2008. While he dabbled with the idea of following the path of his father, other avenues became more attractive and he graduated from Trinity College with a degree in Computer Science.

But Kitt has been struck down with the poker bug in recent years and even when he’s not playing, he’s still involved. At the Irish Open in Dublin’s Burlington Hotel in April, he fronted Paddy Power’s live stream TV coverage alongside Jesse May and Tatiana Pasalic and proved an instant hit with viewers.

“Liam Flood rang me and asked me if I was interested in being part of the Irish Open coverage on TV. I was planning on playing in the event so I had to give it a lot of thought and it was a tough decision. I’d be an ex-rector even though it was definitely something I knew I’d like so I said I’d give it shot.”

“You've always been pretty comfortable on stage or with a microphone in my hand and it's definitely something I'd love to get into more. The Irish Open was an unbelievable experience. It was really hard work as I had a camera in my face for 12 to 14 hours a day but I loved every minute of it and got on really well with Jesse May. He's a top guy. He's works so hard and is a total professional.”

So he’s presenting or playing, poker is very much part of Kitt’s plans for the foreseeable future. “I would like to pursue the presenting thing but I still love playing poker and get a great kick out of it. I hope to stick at it but the game changes and people get better. With a lot of help from friends and mentors I seem to have got a good hold of the game. ‘I don't really like the day-to-day grind online and I much prefer to interact with people in live events. I'm very chatty at the table and I use that to my advantage. While poker is still value, I'll definitely keep playing. I'll only stop if I'm getting beaten up by a load of young guys.”

It's Kitt's maiden voyage in Vegas but he couldn't be going over in much better form. Earlier this month, the Rathdrum man captured the prestigious Celtic Poker Tour Grand Final title in Carlowl, defeating 135 opponents in the process. That field was whittled down to 17 when Sunday arrived and once it became three-handed, Kitt brokered a deal with Tommy Walsh and Dmitrii Pembroke which saw him take the title and a cheque for €19,200.

“It was the first big title I've won so I was happy to finish it off. That's the funny thing about poker, you're never, ever happy unless you win. I finished third in the UKPT last September and I was disgusted. The Celic Poker final has been known as a soft tournament in the past but then obviously good players are coping on to that and playing in it so it's becoming more competitive.

“I couldn't do anything right the first day but I just didn't do anything stupid and hung in there. On the second day I lost a big pot with A-K against pocket aces and my stack went right down. Then when I got going, I really went nuts and just kept going. Once you can get a hold of your table, you have to really make it pay. That’s what I'd be good at – I'd be relentless and just wouldn't stop. I didn't give them a second.”

Irregularly, Kitt is staying with Sean Prendiville – his predecessor as Celtic Poker Tour Grand Final champ – when he arrives in Vegas and their friendship has been a big part of Kitt's development in the poker jungle over the last few years.

“I started asking the best players at certain players that weren't improving despite playing a lot, because their ego was the problem. I never thought I was better than I was. I knew who was good and I wanted to get as much information as possible from the way they played.”

Kitt took time to learn his trade though. Several near misses at the business end of tournaments proved costly and left him reeling in the 'what might have been’. But he has learned from those mistakes and benefited in Carlowl from past failures. Now the challenge is to maintain the winning habit.

“I started about four years ago and won a few quid in the local cash games, then I went on to play in some of the bigger tournaments around Ireland. To begin with, I wasn't getting past day one, then I might scrape into the day twos of tournaments but then as I began to learn more I managed to get to a few final tables.

“I finally started to click and was going well in Waterford but I did a Rory McIlroy (US Masters version!) and made an absolutely hash of it. I know there are no real physical attributes to the game but it was the first time I had played three days in a row and it obviously got to me.

“I had another big chance in Killarney. I was much more focused there but just made one big massive mistake that cost me. Things like that leave you in your bed for the week thinking back over them and it even starts to effect your time machine.

Then when you get your chance again, you have to take it. When you get to the endgame in a poker tournament, you can look around and see the guys that are left. You can use that to your advantage and remind yourself to keep your composure.”

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By David Jennings

THE VEGAS recuperation process will be hasty for Ireland’s top poker players, most of whom will descend on Clontarf Castle for the European Masters of Poker on July 28.

While all eyes are firmly fixed on the WSOP at the Rio right now, it won’t be long before attention will switch to the EMOP which visits Ireland for the very first time this month.

With the prizepool set to soar over €350,000, a stellar line-up will enter the stalls for the Dublin leg and we are expecting over 350 participants. There are 200 from Europe coming over and we’ll have Scandinavians and some from Spain, Italy and the rest then will be Irish and English.

Clontarf Castle, a deluxe four-star hotel, would not be renowned for hosting poker tournaments but O’Sullivan was keen to stress the historic Northside venue should prove extremely alluring for foreign visitors.

He explained: “We picked Clontarf Castle for the people coming from abroad really. Tourists are fascinating by castles and you won’t find a much nicer castle in Ireland than Clontarf. It’s a very picturesque setting and the friends and families of the players in the EMOP will have plenty of fun distractions.”

The structure of the €1,000+100 tournament will be the same as the other EMOPs with each entrant getting a starting stack of 20,000 chips and there will be one-hour levels. There will be 150 to 200 playing Day 1a on the Thursday and then another 150 or so playing Day 1b on the Friday, with the survivors fighting it out for the main prize over the weekend.

O’Sullivan, who took home €5,500 from the Northern Open in Dundalk last weekend, has established a serious reputation as a shrewd poker player. However, he’ll be unable to compete in Clontarf as he’ll have his work cut out ensuring the event runs smoothly.

He admitted: “I have to try and promote the event and supply staff and equipment. Unfortunately I won’t be able to play in it this year because I’ll be organising it. It’s different to a casino as everything is already set in stone in a casino but when you have an event in a hotel, you have to sort things up from scratch.”

John ‘Degumman’ O’Shea will be among the favourites for top honours and he hopes to run deep in a tournament he holds in high regard.

“The EMOPs are always great tournaments,” he said. “I always like to play in as many as I can and the structure of them is great. It would be super to go well in Dublin and hopefully if my Vegas exertions don’t take too much out of me I will be able to have a right good crack at it.”

“From talking to some of the lads, there will probably be a good field heading to Clontarf Castle and the prize pool will be tasty so I’m certainly looking forward to it.”

There have already been three stops on the EMOP tour. Abdul Atila Seiar outlasted a 276-runner field at the Crystal Crown Casino in the Bulgarian resort of Golden Sands early last month.

The Romanian went into heads-up play with Finland’s Riku Molander with a four-to-one chip lead and needed just 15 hands to claim the title, sealing the €65,000 windfall after his pocket threes outraced Molander’s A-5.

The Lisbon leg was won by Finnish poker pro Jukka Koskela who bested a 399-runner field to get his hands on the €72,615 jackpot.

A number of elite poker pros from across Europe travelled to the Casino Estoril in Portugal for the €1,100 main event and Koskela eventually defeated Denmark’s Ager Boye in heads-up play to cap a memorable performance.

Norwegian Hansen lifted the first EMOP season III title in Gran Canaria back in January. He took down €34,160 for his victory in the €1,100 buy-in event at the Casino Las Palmas in the Canary Islands after a four-handed deal.

Hansen beat Yohas Avidani from Israel heads-up after pushing all-in with 6-6 and getting called by 3-3. The board fell K-9-2-A-K, enabling Hansen to follow last year’s winner Maciej Lipowy of Poland as Gran Canaria champion.

An Irish success hasn’t looked likely in any of the EMOP events to date, but with a strong home contingent eager to be crowned Dublin champion, there might just be a Brian Boru-inspired crowd-pleaser winning the Battle of Clontarf on July 31.

The structure of them is great. It would be super to go well in Dublin and hopefully if my Vegas exertions don’t take too much out of me I will be able to have a right good crack at it.”

The EMOPs are always great tournaments,” he said. “I always like to play in as many as I can and the structure of them is great. It would be super to go well in Dublin and hopefully if my Vegas exertions don’t take too much out of me I will be able to have a right good crack at it.”

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Time to cool off on sports betting and concentrate on Vegas challenge

From playing poker in 2011 (that’s not as impressive as it sounds as I am in the red on the poker front this year) to being professional about it. With the rugby season over and the WSOP now in full flow, I need to concentrate on poker and forget about everything else.

I ARRIVED in Vegas a little later than usual last Wednesday. A lot of the lads came out earlier in the month but I had planned to do a triathlon in Kerry on June 11 with a few friends. I chose to do this for several reasons. Number one was because I play better poker when I am physically fit. Number two was that it would get me in good shape for my second weigh in for my weight loss bet with Nick Heather. And three because I came to the WSOP for seven weeks last year and found it too long and very draining. The triathlon was on in Cahirsiveness, which was my grandfather’s hinterland. It was a 750-metre swim, a 20-kilometre cycle and a 5-kilometre run up a cliff face. I had only trained in a 15-metre pool for the swimming and the problem with this was exposed about 15 metres into the swim when I realised that I didn’t have a wall to push off.

Somehow I managed to finish the swim. The cycle and run were pretty straightforward afterwards and I completed it in a time of one hour and 35 minutes, which isn’t great, but not too bad either. I have been in Vegas about a week so far and everything has been great. Well everything bar poker. I haven’t been overly motivated to play and have only played in the $3K and $5K PLO events so far. Both were very similar tournaments for me. I got short by not running well but also by leaking chips in spots where I usually won’t. Then, once short-stacked, I got in ahead to get back to starting stack and got dogged. It’s early days though so hopefully I can turn things around along with the rest of the Irish.

I T HAS BEEN an absolutely horrific performance by the Irish so far over here at the WSOP. Bar a few minor cashes there is absolutely nothing of note to report back. Apart from my brief spells at the table for the two tournaments mentioned above, I have spent most of my time trying to concentrate on my two prop bets.

I have a $3K golf bet with Paul Spillane that was supposed to be played last summer but is going ahead next Monday. I am a serious dog for this one given that Paul quit his job and dedicated the last year of his life to winning this bet.

My odds did improve last week after Paul won back-to-back PLO tournaments for $5K and $50K. He’s been celebrating ever since so there’s a small chance I might catch him on the hop and with a hangover. The other one is that weight loss bet I have with Nick Heather. The weigh-in is before day 1 of the Main Event. I have to get to single figure body fat (9.9% ships the chicken). It’s going to be pretty close but I have been gyuming pretty hard so fingers crossed I can collect $3K off Nick to pay Paul. However, I would quite happily lose both for a run in the $10K PLO or the $10K NHL Main Event. I have heard rumours that Vegas is lovely in November but I certainly wouldn’t mind finding out for myself. Although the way I’m playing at the minute, I’ll be sampling the colder climates of Dublin when November arrives.