

Hooked on Hold'em

BY KEN ADAMS

As the ball dropped over Times Square at midnight on New Year's Eve and America's oldest living teenager, Dick Clark, announced the arrival of 1995, I reflected on the year just ended and the year to come. I realized that 1995 marks the 10th anniversary of my hold'em habit, and I silently thanked Perry Green, who first introduced me to the Cadillac of poker games, no-limit Texas hold'em.

The year was 1985. My youngest daughter was in the fifth grade, and I was serving a term as board chairman at the small independent school she attended on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. The scene was the school's annual fund-raising auction, designed to raise money for scholarships and teacher retirement. Each year, the auction built to the grand finale — a two-week trip to Alaska. Unfortunately, when the auctioneer opened the bidding, no one raised his hand. He skillfully passed over the Alaskan trip and moved on to the remaining lesser items while motioning to me to join him on the podium. Between items, he assured me there would be no problem. He would wait a half-hour, until the bar had poured a few hundred more drinks into the assembled partygoers, and then would bring up the Alaskan trip again. He predicted that if I would help get the bidding started by making the minimum opening bid, there would be a lively auction for the grand prize.

Shortly before midnight, with great flourish, the auctioneer announced the Alaskan trip again. As agreed, I raised my hand to get the bidding started. No one moved a muscle. Six months later, my family and I left for our unintended Alaskan vacation adventure.

Once our friends heard about the trip, advice came pouring in from those who had visited America's "Last Frontier." They all agreed that a visit to David Green and Sons fur shop in Anchorage was a "must." According to the tourist literature,

David Green was the first non-native American to establish a successful fur trade with the natives of Southeast Alaska in the early part of the 20th century. Eventually, he established a fur shop in Anchorage, which still stands on what now is the unfashionable eastern end of Anchorage's main drag.

We were not disappointed. Even though it was a hot summer day, my wife agreed to play the role of interested buyer and proceeded to try on a dozen magnificent coats as I roamed around the old shop enjoying the photo gallery of famous Americans, each of whom was shown with David Green or one of his sons, shaking hands and modeling his or her new fur coat. There were Hubert and Muriel Humphey at the steps of the DC-3 in the 1950s, Cassius Clay in his early days as the champ, sports heroes, entertainers, politicians, and religious leaders — it looked like five generations of famous Americans had bought their furs from David Green and Sons.

I noticed that as the years progressed, the two young boys in some of the early photos became two young men in the middle years, and in the most recent pictures, they were more often seen than the elderly David Green. From the family resemblance, it was apparent they were the "and sons" listed on the marquee. Then I saw a photo that was different from all the rest. Instead of satisfied customers showing off their purchases, it featured two men glaring at each other across a poker table heaped with chips and sur-

rounded by a ring of spectators. As I looked more closely, I noticed that one of the two players was the same bearded fellow I had seen in the other photos on the wall, first as a child, then a young man, then an adult.

Soon I was distracted from the photo gallery by the conversation that was developing between my wife and the saleswoman. She was actually negotiating over the price of a stunning Alaskan parka. The plan had included shopping and trying things on, not buying them. I figured it was just part of the game, until I heard the saleswoman say that she could not agree to a lower price without the boss's approval. She disappeared into the backroom and came out a minute later with a short, round, smiling, bearded man in a leather cutting apron. As my wife was introduced to Perry Green, I realized that he was the man I had recognized in the poker photo on the wall.

As anyone knows who has ever met him, it takes only a few minutes to be charmed by Green, the friendliest furrier you will ever meet. After a while, I could not contain my curiosity any longer and asked him about the poker picture on the wall. He looked in my eyes as he asked, "Do you like to play cards?" It seemed like my verbal response was less important than whatever he saw in my eyes. The next thing I knew, I was following Green into the backroom, where he donned the Binion's Horseshoe cap he was wearing in the photo and pulled out of a desk drawer a copy of Al Alvarez's book, *The Biggest*

Game in Town. The photo on the book's cover was the same as the one on the wall — Perry Green and Stu Ungar playing the final hand in the championship event of the 1981 *World Series of Poker*, with \$750,000 in chips piled on the table.

Green signed the book for me, and presented it to me as a gift on the condition that I must promise to read it. With a 10-hour trip ahead of me, I had no trouble keeping my promise. I devoured the book on

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the plane ride home. I was fascinated by the portraits of the world's greatest poker players and what makes them tick. However, I was confounded by one thing: Though I always had enjoyed every kind of card game and board game — bridge, gin, poker, hearts, casino, go fish, chess, checkers, Clue, Monopoly, Othello, you name it — I had never even heard of Texas hold'em, let alone played it. Yet that obviously was the game the top poker professionals considered the most challenging.

It was apparent how the game was played from the descriptions of the hands in Alvarez's book. What was not so obvious was why the game was more interesting and challenging than seven-card stud and the other forms of poker I had played in college and at family gatherings. It always has been my experience that the only way to explore the intricacies of a game is to play it over and over again. However, it was not clear how I could do that living in the East, where no one else played hold'em, either.

Finally, the solution came to me. I would create a minitournament at home. I enlisted a group of friends and organized a monthly poker game at my house. Each month, before settling down to the usual fare of seven-card stud, night baseball, pass the trash, and assorted other traditional low-limit games, we would play a \$50 freezeout tournament modeled after the *World Series*. The game was no-limit Texas hold'em. One winner took home all the money, less 10 percent for the prize fund. Each time we played, the winner was awarded 100 points and the runner-up, 50 points. That was multiplied by the number of players, which varied from seven to 10 from month to month. We agreed that at the end of the year, the player with the greatest number of points would win the prize — round-trip airfare and hotel expenses to attend the finals of the 1987 *World Series of Poker* in Las Vegas.

As luck would have it, I won the prize. In May 1987, I made my first trip to the *World Series*. I was hooked. I walked around the Horseshoe in a daze, in awe of seeing in person the players I had read about in the book Green had given me. Green was kind enough to pretend he remembered me, and to show me around a bit. I stood at the rail for hours watching Johnny Moss appear to doze his way through the field at the \$30-\$60 game. One by one, they came to take their shot at the grand old man of poker. He snacked on them like peanuts — casually, almost absentmindedly, collecting their chips as his wife sat behind him with her purse primly on her lap. I wondered how many thousands of hours of poker she had seen him play, in how many hundreds of places.

Eventually, I couldn't stand it any longer, I had to play. However, the thought of sitting down with professional players was too absurd to consider, so I wandered across the street to the Fremont, where I spent the next few days taking low-limit hold'em lessons from the locals.

The rest, as they say, is history. Ten years later, limit hold'em finally has made its way to the East Coast. I am able to indulge my hold'em habit as often as I can make the time, which is to say not as often as I would like, but far more often than in 1985. As the new year begins, I am thankful for many things, including my good fortune in meeting Perry Green 10 years ago. The gift he gave me has lasted far longer than the plane ride home from Anchorage. It has brought me years of enjoyment and the promise of years more. Thanks, Perry. See you in May at the *World Series*. ♦

1995 Winnin' O' The Green Tournament

March 9-26, 1995

Thursday, March 9, 2 p.m.
Satellites Begin!

Friday, March 10, 9 a.m.
Satellites

Saturday, March 11, 12 noon, 7 p.m.
Watch Ladies' 9-Ball Championships, Grand Ballroom
Contact Casino Manager for Details

Sunday, March 12, 4:15 p.m.
Limit Hold'em \$100 + \$20

Monday, March 13, 4:15 p.m.
Omaha Hi-Lo \$100 + \$20

Tuesday, March 14, 4:15 p.m.
7-Card Stud \$100 + \$20

Wednesday, March 15, 4:15 p.m.
Lowball \$200 + \$30

Thursday, March 16, 4:15 p.m.
7-Card Stud Hi-Lo \$200 + \$30

Friday, March 17, 4:15 p.m.
No Limit Hold'em \$100 + \$20/Multi-Rebuys
Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with us!

Saturday, March 18, 4:15 p.m.
Limit Hold'em \$100 + \$20/Multi-Rebuys
First Prize: 1995 Automobile!
All money over the price of the car
will be returned to the players!

Sunday, March 19, 4:15 p.m.
Limit Hold'em \$200 + \$30/One Rebuy

Monday, March 20, 4:15 p.m.
Omaha Hi-Lo \$300 + \$30

Tuesday, March 21, 4:15 p.m.
7-Card Stud \$200 + \$30

Wednesday, March 22, 4:15 p.m.
7-Card Stud Hi-Lo \$200 + \$30

Thursday, March 23, 4:15 p.m.
Omaha Hi-Lo \$200 + \$30

Friday, March 24, 12 noon
Spring Swing Golf Tournament
Open to all Winnin' O' The Green Tournament Players!

Saturday, March 25, 4:15 p.m.
Limit Hold'em \$300 + \$30

Sunday, March 26
1:15 p.m. Ladies' Hold'em \$100 + \$20
4:15 p.m. No Limit Hold'em \$500 + \$40

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