

**Chile out, dude!**

My name is Daniel. I'm 24 years old, come from Chile and am living in Toronto, Canada for the time being. The reasons that made me move here are simple: maple syrup and pancakes, as we have neither in Chile. Oh, and also to play poker, as I'm a professional player for 2 years now. You read it right: I make a living with two cards in hand (well, sometimes more cards, depending on the game, but my specialty is deep stacks Texas Hold'em, a game where you're dealt 2 hole cards - your personal cards, that is - and 5 community cards that are shown on the table and that all players can use, trying to make the best hand possible). Yes, some people look me in a funny way when I tell them what I do for a living, but on the other hand that's the same people that will be paying their mortgage and two cars for the next 40 years, while I have managed to buy my own house and a sports car in a year and a half, so I don't mind looking funny. I sometimes play online, but I dedicate most of my time to brick and mortar poker, as this is a people's game, and if you want to succeed, you have to know your opponents by playing against them in red life. I also prefer real life tournaments because I usually see a lot of shark friends, and because playing online is a lot more complex as you don't see faces, just bits! I moved to Canada as the game culture here is at a level Chileans wouldn't dream of, allowing better cash prizes and subsequently a higher lifestyle. Living large, baby! Living large!

**Living la vida loca**

I am preparing myself for a huge tournament that is going to happen live, in a week, at the Bellagio, one of the top casinos in Las Vegas, and this is also a huge advantage of living in Canada, as the U.S. are right around the corner, with flights every day and night to any place in the world. I have been contacting some famous American players that are friends of mine to play some high stakes poker, as one who enters this sort of tables is everything but afraid to lose money. I am not yet satisfied, as I plan to retire by my 40th anniversary or sooner, maybe opening a casino in the process, so I have to fare particularly well during the next 10 or so years. I'm sure I will, but for that I had to move to Canada, and eventually will have to move later to the United States. Since Canada is much cheaper and relaxed, it was the right choice. This is the only rule: be wherever the money is, as long as it's not your money that's at stake. Today though, all that matters is that I'm going out with some buddies to a nightclub opening and have to get myself some fancy club suit so the ladies don't miss me. In the end, a professional poker player is regarded much like a top Hollywood celebrity, where all that matters is what you look like on the outside. It's a crazy life we live man: all that matters is what doesn't really matter, get it? Yeah, neither do I, but it's like they say - go with the flow; so I do, and keep the sneer remarks to myself.

### **Scary monsters and super creeps**

So this new nightclub is owned by an acquaintance of mine, and I wanted to impress her it seemed to be the nuts in Toronto at the moment, or at least everybody's talking about it... OK, and also because I'd give my left arm to spend a night with her in bed. No can do, though - friends be friends. But anyway, the limo dropped us at the door and we were allowed inside immediately after we flashed our golden tickets, which were distributed to a restrict handful of people. I was impressed: the nightclub itself was massive on one hand, and very stylish and elitist on the other, clearly stating whoever did the job wasn't less than a pro: the bars, the VIP lounge, the lights, the decoration, even the cages hanging from the ceiling with hot female dancers in underwear inside... the place was just GOOD! As I was admiring it, two bouncers came to me and escorted me to the VIP lounge to talk to Diane, my friend and owner of the club. As with everything in this life, I don't act like I think, since looks are everything in my line of work, so when we met and greeted each other, the usual small talk occurred, like what did I think of it, how was I, etc., so I said to her all was fine and the place was OK (inside, I really thought the place was one of the best I'd ever been to, but you can't just show you're bedazzled at something, no sir you can't, as it would make you look like a hillbilly new in town. Live and learn). I had some drinks and left at 4 am, later than I wanted to, as I would be travelling to Vegas the day after. Oh well, tools of the trade...

## Viva Las Vegas!

This is how the song goes: "If you've seen it once, you'll never be the same again!" Nothing else can be said more accurately about Las Vegas, as the Sin City bewitches anyone that sees it for the first time. I was ready to board my flight and felt blessed for bringing my iPad along, as that way I could kill some time and relax for a bit, playing... online slots. What? You thought I'd be playing poker to relax?! This is one of my most well-guarded secrets: I usually play online slots in Spanish casinos over the internet, as poker is business, and I'm entitled to a little fun too. Besides, poker is a game where you can predict winnings, losses and bets, unlike slots. Slots only have one strategic key, and that's when you press the spin button. All else is 100% left to chance; there's no bluffing, no lies, no deceit, just chance. I love it, as it doesn't require you to study other people to win a pot - you just spin it and try to get lucky, just for the kicks of it. It's been a long way from Chile: from watching poker stars on TV to become their personal friend and high stakes table partner is the fruit of 3 years of hard work every single day, but I did it. Everything considered, I just worked my ass off to climb the ladder; it's not different from impressing your boss with hard work and getting a promotion at the office - except that there's no office, and the wage and bonus performances are a tiny bit better. 4 hours passed like 4 minutes, and the usual words from the flight attendant flooded the plane: please fasten your seatbelt, bla, bla, bla. It's 7 pm and I was really into checking out to have some dinner.

## The Bellagio

After dinner, I rang my friends and we decided to meet at the Bellagio to rent one of the VIP rooms for our first high stakes session. Pro's like Tom Dwan, Daniel Negreanu, Dario Minieri, Gus Hansen and Doyle Brunson would be there, so that would make for a very competitive and enlightening practice for the main event a few days later. Of course, there's always the chance of leaving the table in the morning with a million dollars or more, depending on how things go, and if I'd lose the 100 thousand dollars required to sit at the table, it's just money in the end, and this is why we play high stakes: 100 thousand is a really low price to learn with all the other top level pros, and to see what can be improved under pressure. The Bellagio itself is a monument, and not just a hotel and casino, while the perks of playing there are massive - it adds up to your reputation, as you are seen worldwide on several TV programs like "Poker After Dark". Besides, the structure is a mega-investment that, when it opened, was considered the most expensive hotel ever made, and it won 11 times the most prestigious award a hotel can get. 8000 people work there, so you can see how big it is. I met with Daniel at the lobby and we hugged cheerfully, as we hadn't seen each other for 2 years or so. We talked a bit about my moving to Toronto (he's Canadian, so there's a bond of some sort) and my expectations, and I told him I was getting along quite well. When we entered the room, everyone's waiting for us, so on we went!

## Bullets and Cowboys, Ladies and Hooks

Poker is a game of skill and memory, as well as some luck in between - not too much unlike what most people think. Then, it's so diverse in terms of slang that you need ages just to talk the talk like a pro: there's Pocket Swans (Pocket refers to the 2 private cards that you are dealt, and Swans is 22, an analogy to the swan shaped numbers), Bullets (2 Aces), Cowboys (2 Kings), Ladies (2 Queens), Hooks (2 Jacks) and a myriad more names for each combination of two cards that you have in hand or also at the table. At a given point, I was limping (the same to say I was calling instead of betting) against a very aggressive Gus Hansen, who would bet and even re-raise a raise from some other player, and it seemed to me he was hiding something, but we'll get to that. Limping is wrong, as it's not aggressive at all, and the number one rule in poker is that aggressive poker is winning poker, PERIOD. If your hand is weak, you don't limp (that is, you don't call the previous bet), you fold the hand. On the other hand, Gus is the King of Loose (Loose refers to a playing style where the player acts as if he couldn't be beat, a mix of gambling and aggression, and sometimes it pays off very well, but some other times it's just ruining), and since I had AQ clubs' suited (that is, of the same suit, like both cards' suit is Diamonds or Clubs or other suit), I called his \$13000 raise. The flop (the three first cards that are dealt on the table) was Kc (King of clubs) 3h (3 of hearts) and 10c (you guessed it: 10 of clubs), and this was a good flop for me, as all I needed now was another club OR an Ace OR a King to smash him completely. He made a continuation bet (a bet that is made to keep the pressure on) of \$18000, and I called. On the turn (the 4th card shown), I got the club I needed and now had a Flush (5 cards of the same suit), and Gus bet \$48000, which I wisely called instead of raising, so he wouldn't know my hand by guessing. The river (the 5th and last card) showed a deuce of diamonds, nothing dangerous, and Gus bet \$98000, which I promptly raised to \$178,000, much to his dismay. He thought for a second, called, showdown (that's when all the players still playing reveal their cards) came and he said "*Sick, man...so sick...*"

This is how I sometimes make \$600,000 a night at high stakes tables, baby.

## Tips and bluffing

We decided to leave at 4.30 in the morning to go have a bite somewhere and talk about strategy, and since Doyle is almost 200 years old (joking, he is a senior, true, but one of the game's living legends) he left to his suite. Negreanu, Hansen, Minieri and I left the Bellagio and went downtown for some hours of fun. NYC may be the city that never sleeps, but Las Vegas is the only city where the money never stops, no matter what. While we were eating some sandwiches and having a beer, we were talking at the same time about random personal facts, like next vacation plans, online commitments and contracts with poker rooms, joking here and there about the future of poker, until we got down to business. Negreanu told me that my playing style is too much conservative for his liking, and so did Dario and Gus, so I made a mental note about it. He told me that all the upcoming pros still need to sharpen some edges, and that I needed to be much more aggressive depending on circumstances, but that I definitely needed to limp less and bet or raise quite more, as it makes the competition go away and the chances of battling against one or two players is much higher with a strong hand than against more players. I paid attention to all the tips, and then he told me about bluffing. *“There’s nothing called bluff, that’s what your opponents say you are doing, but if they want to prove you wrong, they have to go against you!”*

This meant that bluffing is what people think we're doing when we in fact have a strong hand, so that is a great advantage to good players, as they'll milk those weaker players. After a couple of hours, we called it a night (or morning, if you prefer) and headed home, my home being a suite at the Bellagio.

**Countdown Sequence: 5...**

5 days to go, and all I cared about was to go shopping for gadgets and some books too. When I lived in Chile, making less than \$300 a month and being treated as trash, I learned a very valuable lesson: never leave behind the things that you like the most. In my case, it's mathematics, and I'm sure that's why I fare so good at poker, as I'm a math prodigy (no other player knows this about me, and it has proven to be a huge edge against the field): I can recite a Fibonacci string for one hour long, for instance (I did that before). When people show me a page filled with equations and complex, advanced formulas, I react the same way you do while reading this - naturally. That's why I wanted to go out, to buy some books on Gravitational Lensing and also an infrared virtual keyboard and enjoy the day as best as I could, away from a poker table, that even though is fun it doesn't even compare to math. Then, I'd be off to see some friends non-related to poker and have a pleasant fine dining evening, as Vegas is the best city in the world for exquisite cuisine. I sometimes feel lost, even though this clearly is my playground, but on the other hand everything is served to you on a silver platter as long as you have an American Express Centurion card always at hand. I get mixed feelings, I do, but for now I'll just be the passenger of this somewhat short trip called life and make the best of the hand that's dealt to me.

### What happens in Vegas...

Even though Las Vegas is a great city by night, it's also quite dangerous and unwelcoming in some parts away from the main strip. Doyle Brunson told me that where he came from, it wasn't unusual to see someone die at a table because of cheating, and that his Poker Course 101 was lived by this principle: always know when to leave, whether you're winning or losing, but especially when you're winning. Of course I'm talking about illegal joints where you can play poker, sometimes betting your life in the process, and even though many think that it's part of the legend, let me tell you something: it's not! Them that know best say that the Nevada desert is full of holes, and that they were excavated by no groundhogs. In fact, the urban legend goes as far as to say that for every winner in Vegas, there are three graves in the desert. Be it as it may, I'm not scared or something, I just think it's cool to know a bit about every place's history I go to play, though Vegas is certainly the most eerie and somber one to date. The ads on the street of missing people don't help much if at all, so I'll just stick to legal gambling instead of shady business, that's for sure. All in all, the city is quite nice and challenging, but I wonder what other things happen on the outskirts that are not meant for tourists to see. I wasn't leaving the casino anyway, as I wasn't feeling like it and also because anything I would want to do to kill time was available inside. There would be another poker meeting the day after, so I just took the time to rest.

**Odds, pot, do and do not**

Gus called me at about 11 am, arranging for a lunch rendezvous, so why the hell not. I was dying to get some fresh air anyway, so after contacting my mom on the phone I showered, got dressed and prepared to leave. During the shower I felt happy that my mother was proud of my endeavors and success, and she tried not to miss one single episode of any poker program where I'd show up. The least I could have done was to buy her a house and a big home cinema, as she barely leaves home since after my father died, and because I started to earn big time playing poker, I asked her to consider retiring so she could live for as long as possible in the utmost quality. She did so and that relieved me. When I got outside Gus was waiting in a rented SUV, so we went to have lunch, talked for a while, departed and agreed to meet again at 9pm at the Bellagio for another session. At 9.30pm, I was still folding hands as I preferred to study the pots and odds. The pot is the amount of chips on the table (or money, in this case), and the odds are the probabilities you have over your opponents with your hand and what's on the table, and still the cards that hadn't been shown yet. What to do: consider your odds carefully and then divide them by the numbers of opponents still playing against your hand. Then, make the move that you think is more logical. What not to do: ignore the previous statement, of course. If you are not patient, then don't play poker, as you'll win more often by committing your bank role (the money you have available) with a strong hand. This obviously isn't all you need to know about poker, but it's a good start. We left early and didn't go out tonight, as everyone had something planned to do already.

**Money isn't everything, it's two!**

The big tourney would be hosted in two days at the Bellagio's main room, and I was dying for it to start so I could apply all that I had learned so far. There's a golden rule I haven't told you about yet, and that is about money! In poker, money is your only goal: fake, deceive, lie and everything else you need to do that is legit to accomplish your goal. As rude as it may seem, and even though the guys I was hanging with are top world pros and very amicable all along, they will rip your throat if they can on a poker match, as the main goal for you is the same for them - money! Of course we're not going to kill each other over it, but this type of gents knows when to bite. The story I'm about to tell you is as real as it gets: once, Doyle Brunson saw Amarillo Slim play heads up against a fish (by the way: fish is the term that is used to categorize a bad or inexperienced player), and even though the fish was the natural underdog, every bet that Slim committed to the pot was answered with a brutal re-raise by the fish. Slim had pocket kings (KK), and the table showed AK4 rainbow (rainbow meaning all cards of a different suit). Amarillo was surprised that pre-flop he had bet a lot and got raised, and after his chunky bet post flop, he got a raise four times bigger than his bet. The man thought for a while, counting bank roles and caressing his chips between his fingers, and suddenly folded. The crowd gasped when Amarillo revealed to his opponent the KK, but his opponent simple smirked and showed him the cards that he had: AA. Slim nodded as if saying *"Yes son, I'm no fool, thank you very much, and I'll get you later on."* So, what would you have done? I'd probably had gone all in, losing to the fish, but Slim knew better and understood that, in the end, it's all about the money. Sure, players like Slim have developed a 6th sense over the years, but what matters is that your opponent could actually have AA (as this one did), and in that case you'd be in for a lot of lost money. Never forget the lesson: unless you have the best hand (and that's easy to verify), you could be losing money with every bet you make, no matter how good your hand is, because... it'll always be the second best hand.

**And now, your moment of Zen**

The big day was less than 24 hours away, so all I wanted to do in the eve was to read about math and practice alone with a deck of cards. I start by shuffling them all and keep on turning them with my pocket cards in front of me to see when I will I hit trips (three of a kind) or at least two pair. It may seem odd, but besides relaxing my mind, I also get to learn statistics. They are very important to keep me focused, so I always do this on the eve of a very important tournament like that one was. I also wonder about my previous life and how radically it has changed since I found out about my disorder (yes, my aptitude for mathematics is in fact a clinical disorder, but I really couldn't be more happy with it) and, of course, about poker and how I could capitalize on it. I once was very miserable with life and how it did turn out to get worse after my father died, and now I'm aiming at the stars and nothing will keep me from doing it. After the training, I went for a scotch at the Bellagio's main bar, watched some TV and read a newspaper just for a change, as I needed to go to bed early that night to be in perfect shape the morning after. I always get a funny feeling the day before, like butterflies but all over, but after the first 4 or 5 hands I stabilize and do my best to cash-in.

**Unleash hell!**

As I was given my table and seat number, I went outside to talk to Negreanu and have a chat regarding any final tips he might feel I should know before the start of the tournament. In a nutshell, he thought that my play is fierce and coherent, and apart from the passive issue, I was very well headed. He also told me that by looking at me he remembered how he himself was at my age, with the same passion for poker and wanting to become the best in the game one day, although he realized sooner than me that aggressiveness was the key to the game along with the basics and gut instinct. It's not every day that Negreanu himself compares someone to him at his age eh, eh! We were called as the tournament was starting, so game on! During the first day I managed to kick two guys, and ended up comfortably so I could fight the day after. Everything was going as planned, even though Gus was kicked due to some idiot who went all in with deuces and ended up with a 4 of a kind on the turn and on the river! Gus just laughed as the fish didn't even figure Gus had a straight on the flop, the nuts. We all left the precinct after the first day and went out to have some junk food at Gus' rented house. We all asked him how things were going in Monaco, and he told us he actually liked the Principality as it's easy going and calm during the Winter and very lively and colored in the summertime. We ended up playing some hands to see who'd be washing the dishes after dinner, and even though Gus won, we declined the honor much to his "*Hey, but we had a deal!*" whining, which made us laugh and struggle for air thanks to his serious face. Tomorrow would be another day, so I excused myself of being very tired both mentally and emotionally, but wished him the best of luck with the dishes ah, ah, ah!

### The more things change, the more they stay the same

It's day two and I was mentally fit to blast away the competition for the sole reason of wanting more and more. I started with a total chip count of 270,000, and I was average but on the good track with my expertise and secret dysfunction. I was seating at a table with many low players, so I followed Negreanu's advice and started pounding at the blinds (this is the amount you commit to the pot to see the flop, and there are the big and small blinds, which rotate the table clockwise), and suddenly I found myself 360,000 chips fatter; thanks Daniel, it works! At some given time, I was dealt pocket Aces (AA) and bet 3000 pre-flop, and some guy called. I couldn't figure what he had, but I mentally thanked him for being a chump. The flop is Kh As 2s, so I bet 14000 to build up pressure and oblige him to fold or, better, call. The guy instantly called, and I was staggered. Even if he had the second best hand, which would be KK, I had this guy nailed to the cross so hard that he'd be asking God Himself to take him soon enough. The turn showed 10d, and with this rainbow I was more than secure, so I shoved all in as it's pretty much won, BUT THEN HE CALLS! WHAT THE HELL IS THIS GUY SPORTING, A FIFTH ACE? All of a sudden, and looking at the table with more attention, I saw that there were two spades there already, but that guy couldn't be stupid enough to call me that much without at the very least two pair, and I was sure he couldn't be expecting a third spade, that would be mental, you just don't do that with a mediocre hand pre-flop, and the best play would be to fold to a 3000 chips bet. He in fact had two spades and the flop revealed the third spade to my disgust. The other players at the table started laughing at how stupid the fish played and still managed to win, with an even more stupid remark in the end, *"That's poker!"*, a phrase that was coined by Doyle Brunson himself, **who happened to be behind me and I didn't even realize it**, and to which he replied: *"Poker is poker, but what you just did there is a joke and a disgrace to the game, son. Best of luck anyway."* The table burst and applauded the man, and the players turned to all colors when he asked me if I'd playing with the guys tonight at the penthouse, to which I nodded affirmatively. The poor guys at the table didn't even know me, let alone my achievements so far. Oh well, it was time to check how Negreanu was faring.

**Toronto in 48**

After that play, I was joked all night long whenever I folded or thought too much about a decision or even sneezed with the now legendary “*That’s poker!*” catch phrase. The guys liked to see me and invited me to another gambling night the day after, to which I agreed and delayed my flight to Toronto for another 48 hours. After the session, we all went out to a burger house near the Bellagio that Gus loves for the unreal size of the burgers, and we discussed theory, shared funny poker stories we lived throughout the years (even though I’m a baby compared to the guys, I feel they respect me as a seasoned veteran) and had a laugh with Doyle’s imitation of the fish that beat me at the table, frowning his face and saying in a *falsetto* with both arms at his waist “*That’s Poker!*”, much to our delight and laughter, as the man is a hell of a funny guy when he wants to. It’s interesting: I do not miss Toronto, as it’s not my original home, so I think that after Canada I’m paying mom a little visit in Chile, just for the surprise and to feel HOME again. Homesick was never much my style, to be honest, but after some time you get down to Earth and start thinking about your life and what you are going to do next, or at least I do. Nevertheless, I want to buy her something really nice, like a gold bracelet with stones or something fancy like that, so tonight I’m skimming some guys at the high stakes poker table at the Bellagio, that’s for sure. Only after will I put all this into my online site, DanielPoker.com, as I’m in need of some vacations from this anyway. No matter what, I’m pretty sure that life has opened its door for me – all I got to do now is enter and enjoy the best that I can.