The Carson Raymond Foundation

November 23, 2009 By Shawn Decker

Gwenn and I watch a lot of poker on TV, usually before we go to bed. It's oddly hypnotizing- the sound of the chips, the chatter at the table, Ali Nejad's wonderful Poker After Dark commentary.

I also enjoy playing Texas Hold 'Em... my gambling nickname? "UpperDecker".

The Urban Dictionary defines an "upperdecker" as such...

"The upperdecker is a prank that you can pull on a friend or loved one, or more likely someone who deserves it. An upperdecker is defined as defecating in the upper tank of a toilet, allowing it to fester for as long as possible and sending a chilling brown residue into the bowl upon each flush."

Example: At a party where they run out of beer one might like to leave an "upperdecker" to show their disapproval.

It's just my last name combined with my cunning ability to get the upperhand on my opponents. And a good nickname is important because in poker, just like in line at the grocery store, you *have* to get every psychological edge that you can on whoever is acting in front of or behind you. Now, has my intimidating nickname forced a host to occasionally fold a big hand to me?

Very likely.

At the table, I keep this a secret... but, here I can reveal... I promise I have never upperdecked anyone.

A few weeks ago, I got a notice from one of my poker pals about a fundraiser that involved playing a Texas Hold 'Em tournament. The minimum suggested donation was $100, and I thought for a while about whether to enter, since things are a bit tight financially this month. What convinced me to do so was that the proceeds were going to the Carson Raymond Foundation.

Carson lived in the community; I didn't know him personally, but I heard from my barber about the boy who died from H1N1 back in October. The foundation was set up in his honor to encourage kids to "Go Play" by raising money to build baseball fields and provide transportation and equipment. Carson loved the sport, and in reading about him and the foundation, I remembered how much I loved baseball; how excited I was when my parents let me "go play" baseball alongside my big brother, despite having hemophilia. The clincher to donate/participate was a local newspaper article, in which John Raymond- Carson's father- explained that "parents should not be freaked out that their kid is going to die from this." He went on to say that kids are less likely to die from the swine flu, and that his son had a history of illness and "just had the wrong body for this."

The tournament was last Friday night, and I ran into a friend whom I'd played cards with a couple of years ago. He said he'd coached Carson in baseball for a short time. After catching up, we went to our assigned tables- 14 in total, with 8 or 9 players at each one. With over 120 players, the tournament was a smashing success before it even got started. Carson's family was there, smiling widely and thanking people for showing up to "Play" in Carson's honor.

The tournament was set up to go fast, as to raise more money for the Foundation and spend less on renting the room at the Doubletree hotel where it was taking place. Though I've played a lot of poker over the last five years, this was my first real tournament. I was prepared to be back at home in my pajamas in no time, but as it went on I kept surviving, and won hands without threatening any shenanigans that involve a toilet bowl. People were in good spirits; it was all good, clean fun.

Though all the money went to the Foundation- as it should- there was a prize table set up for players who made the Final Table of 10. My friend, Carson's former coach, made it to the final table, where a crowd of people were gathered. I scooped up my short stack of chips, the third smallest at the table, and joined him there. I'll spare you the hand-to-hand details and cut to the finish: I got second place, and won a 40" flat screen TV that I'll probably sell to the chagrin of everyone I know. When I got home with that TV, it was the most exciting return to the townhome in ten years, when Gwenn came in wearing her hard-earned Miss Powhatan crown.

I got to meet Carson's family, and told them how much I admire them. They lived through- and continue to cope with- a tragedy that occurred less than two months ago, yet there were the Raymonds, smiling and doing something to contribute to their community. It was a privilege to contribute what I could to their foundation, and it was an absolute honor to go play for Carson Raymond.

This one was for you, kid.

Positively Yours,
Shawn

Shawn on: Shawn’s book Decker’s Daily Coffee

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